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THE CONVICT'S MARRIAGE.

PROLOGUE.

It was past twelve, and the scorching heat of a June day had been followed by a night which threatened to be stormy. There was no moon and not a star shone in the firmament, the gas-lamps hardly pierced the darkness of the night, which was relieved by no ray of light. A profound silence reigned in the Saint-Paul quarter. The river flowed on in sombre silence, the embankment was deserted, and the river-side could not be distinguished from the Seine. The trees on the Quai de l'Entrepôt were motionless, not a leaf was stirring. Nature was sleeping ! On the Quai de la Rapée, near the Bridge of Austerlitz, before the door of a ball-room which was just being closed, a group of people were standing round a man lying on the ground ; the unfortunate fellow's face was covered with blood, his clothes were torn, and he was in a fainting state.

"He's done for !" remarked one of the spectators.

"He won't come round for more than an hour," said another.

"The night air will do him good," said a third, "it's very pleasant to sleep outside this hot weather."

"You've left him in a nice state," said a fourth spectator, addressing a big fellow who was turning down his sleeves and arranging his dress after the struggle which had just taken place.

"Yes, and if he isn't satisfied, he can have as much again," said the man in a threatening tone. The speaker who was known as *Le Charpentier*, on account of the trade he followed, was a big handsome fellow of about thirty. His robust neck, emerging from broad and massive shoulders, bore a handsome face ; his forehead was rather low, but his nose was straight and clearly cut, his mouth of a pure design, his small eyes were long and dark—the shadow of the eyelids showing up their savage expression, his hair, beard and skin were all dark, and he was dressed in a suit of velvet corduroy. It was *Le Charpentier* who had thrown the young fellow down. A fair young girl, rather pretty, poorly but coquettishly dressed, was gazing sorrowfully at the scene going on before her ; and said to *Le Charpentier*, "You are not going to leave him there all night, are you ?" She had probably been the cause of the fight, for, looking at her straight in the face, *Le Charpentier* replied in a rough voice :—

"What do you want to know for ? You are too fond of him. Do you still love your Jacques ? It wouldn't take long to finish him—we are

not going to stay here for the policeman, I don't want to sleep at the station house ; come Linotte, take my arm and let's be off ! ”

The young girl trembled, but took his arm, and slyly turned her head, to throw a last glance of pity and regret or perhaps of love to the poor fellow lying in the street, murmuring “ Poor Jacques.” One of the individuals who had witnessed the fight picked up the victim's cap, placed it on his head, and said in a bantering tone :—

“ It's hot in the day-time, but the nights are cool, you mustn't take cold, old man.”

They all laughed, then shook hands and went away, saying :—“ We shall meet again next Thursday, there's a ball here.”

Le Charpentier gave Linotte his arm, they crossed the Bridge de l'Ecluse, and went along the Quai du Mail ; when they had gone about fifty yards, he said to his companion :—

“ You are not very cheerful for a wedding day, Linotte ; do you know that I have long had a passion for you—”

“ Ah ! ” replied the girl, without knowing what he said.

“ Yes, I said to myself some time ago :—Whenever she likes, I will quickly rid her of her Jacques—didn't you see I loved you ? ”

“ I loved Jacques.”

Le Charpentier knit his brows, stopped Linotte, placed her before himself with a vigorous movement, and said in a threatening tone :—

“ Take care, my beauty, you left Jacques of your own accord this evening, be careful, for if ever you speak to him again, look out for yourself and him too—Pray do not do so ! ”

Linotte shuddered, but said nothing. They walked on, and Le Charpentier continued in a kinder tone :—

“ Why did you leave him if you still love him ? ”

“ Because he spoke to me about you, he was jealous.”

“ Ah ! he was jealous ; well, what then ? ”

“ A man should never let a woman think she might love some one else, the fact of his being jealous prompts her to look at other men.”

“ And you looked at me ? ”

“ Yes, I saw that you were a big strong fellow, and thought I should love such a man as that.”

“ Ah ! you thought that ! ” said Le Charpentier, pulling himself up, delighted at this confession.

“ Yes, and when I think of anything, I must have it—even at the risk of regretting and giving it up afterwards,” she added, in a lower tone.

But Le Charpentier was only thinking of the avowal she had just made, and did not hear what followed.

“ This evening,” she continued, “ I told him I should speak to you and dance with you ; I told him this without thinking of what might happen, and simply to tease him. He forbade me doing so.”

“ He forbade you, he ! that's too much, a little shrimp of a man like that forbid you to speak to me. And what then ? ” asked Le Charpentier, with the persistence of a lover who knows he can only expect to hear something disagreeable.

“ I smiled, you spoke to me, and we danced together, he danced with another girl, and when he came back to fetch me, I said to you : ‘ Reply to him yourself’—You then had a dispute.”

“ You whispered to me. ‘ Rid me of this man, and I will remain with you.’ ”

"Yes, I said so, because I was annoyed, but I was not in earnest."

"Linotte, it is too late to confess, I am a man, you know!"

By saying he was a man, Le Charpentier meant: "I am a brute, capable of anything." Linotte understood him, for she at once replied:—

"You can see I keep my promise, as I am with you. Are you going to commence beating me already?" and the poor girl pressed her companion's arm.

"Oh! when I love anyone, I love them well!" exclaimed Le Charpentier, flourishing his fist in the air.

"Yes, you loved Jacques well!" murmured Linotte.

They walked on in silence, Linotte thinking, Le Charpentier biting his moustaches. There was a tempest brewing in his brain; and in the air also, for the lightning darted its vivid flashes, lighting up the quays, the river-side and the river itself with its fantastic gleams. Tearing his collar off, the man stopped and drew a long breath.

"Oh! I am choking—the heat is something overpowering to-night. Let's sit down, Linotte. I want to be near you—to tell you I love you, and that I will kill anyone who might try to take you from me."

They sat down on a seat, and he continued:—

"I am a strong fellow, and have the instincts and appetites of strong men—People say: 'strong and stupid,' and that may be so, so long as the Law does not say to me: 'I forbid you to do that,' I do as I like. I want you, you are my property, you belong to me, and this fist will break the head of any man who may try to take you from me, and even of anyone whom you may appear to love. Do you understand me, Linotte, that's how I love; like the tiger and the lion, who receive their rivals with open mouth and gleaming teeth, ready to devour the animal who prowls around their females. I now feel sorry I did not strangle your sweet-heart."

"But I no longer love Jacques," said Linotte, quickly, struggling against the cold which was making her shiver. "I said that simply to tease you," added she, bending down her head, to hide her tears. The unfortunate girl was thinking of the poor fellow she had left lying in the street, half dead. She was thinking how, in a moment of spite, she had left the man she really loved, the man who had fought for her, and whom she had so basely betrayed. Jacques was good-hearted, his only fault being that he loved her too well, and she, stupid and ungrateful girl, had preferred this rough brute. She was already punished, she was ashamed and afraid, and trembled when, coming close to her, Le Charpentier put his arm round her waist, kissed her, and said:—

"Oh! yes, I really love you, Linotte, as one loves something which one despairs of ever obtaining. I really love you sincerely. Do you know that when you spoke to me, I turned red, and did not know what to say to you. Love is such a stupid thing, it burns me here; near you, I tremble in a way I do not understand."

The young girl, avoiding his kisses, drew further back, but Le Charpentier took her in his arms. He was really trembling, and, kissing her again, he said:—

"You will see how I shall love you, you will be obliged to love me in return."

"I am choking," said Linotte, disengaging herself from his arms, "I feel bad, let us walk on."

"Yes, let us walk on, Linotte, you will soon be better, it's the excitement."

She got up, took his arm, and they walked on. They had hardly gone ten steps towards the Bridge de l'Estacade, when Le Charpentier suddenly stopped and listened, saying: "Who is that running behind us at this time of night?" He tried to distinguish what it was through the darkness, and added in a half whisper:—"Is it a man coming to rob me of my money or of my wife? We must look into this."

They were near the Bridge de l'Estacade, the first bridge over the Seine connecting the Ile Saint-Louis with the Quai Saint-Paul, an old wooden construction, under which the water swirled and surged on its being diverted from its regular course. Linotte had left her companion's arm, and the latter went forward to meet a shadow that came running towards him. The night was very dark, and the storm which had been threatening all day, suddenly burst forth, the thunder roared and the rain began to fall. When the shadow had got within ten paces, Le Charpentier placed himself in a defensive attitude, and cried out:—

"What do you want?"

"I want to finish what we commenced yonder," said an angry voice.

"It's Jacques!" yelled Le Charpentier, bounding towards him.

"It's he," said Linotte, in a low and almost joyful tone, running and placing herself behind Jacques, ready to assist him in the coming struggle, and preparing for that purpose a pair of long scissors she had in her pocket.

"Ah! you want some more!" cried Le Charpentier, turning up his sleeves. "So much the worse for you."

"You acted like a blackguard, and a coward; do you hear me, you big coward!"

"I will settle you," roared the infuriated Le Charpentier. "You can sing your death song."

"We shall see all about that. You are warned, no pity, no quarter, I want none, and will give none, take my life or I take yours!"

"Well come on then, you sneak."

The two men rushed on each other, and nothing could be heard but their gaspings for breath. The rain was falling in big drops, a regular summer rain. Linotte, frightened, hardly able to breathe, her hands placed across her bosom heaving with excitement and fear, stood up against the parapet of the Quai. Her lips were moving—Linotte was praying! The two men were hugging each other until their bones cracked, and the heavy sound of their falling fists was heard from time to time; mingled with cries, oaths and savage yells. Le Charpentier seemed the strongest, but Jacques was more agile; he had seized his adversary by the collar, and nearly strangled him. "Ah! you want to choke me," yelled Le Charpentier, uttering a fearful oath. Then shaking himself like a bull, he disengaged himself from Jacques' grasp, and drawing back a little, drew a long breath, to compensate for the air he had lost during the struggle. Jacques fell down, but immediately jumped up and assumed a defensive attitude. Linotte glided up to him and said:—"Run away, Jacques, run across the Estacade, I will follow you, it's you I love—" Linotte thought he had come to fight for her! He heard what she said, but did not understand her; waiting for the resumption of the fight, he was watching his adversary, with clenched teeth and foaming mouth. Le Charpentier, blinking his eye, biting his lip, was balancing himself on his legs, to get a good firm stand; without being aware he was talking aloud, he said to himself:—"This has lasted too long, I must put an end to it!"

He was going to rush forward, when Linotte seized Jacques' arm and dragged him away saying :—"Let us run away across the Estacade, he wants to murder you, he has his compasses." The young man followed her, whilst Le Charpentier, mingling his voice with the raging elements cried out :—"I will murder you, you scoundrel !" It was true, the scoundrel had taken out his compasses, and had it not been for Linotte's rapid movement, Jacques would have been lost. They ran off, but on arriving half way over the bridge, the young man stopped. "Come on," said Linotte, dragging him along, "he is behind us."

"I will go no further, let me alone. I am not a coward, and do not choose adversaries weaker than myself—We must settle these big, strong fellows, once for all, I don't care for the man or his compasses."

"Ah ! you are running away !" cried Le Charpentier.

Jacques pushed Linotte aside, stepped forward, and replied :—

"Come and see, you coward."

Le Charpentier rushed towards him with upraised arm, but Jacques who was watching him, withstood the shock, and seized his opponent's arm, so suddenly, that the compasses dropped from Le Charpentier's hand. Jacques picked them up, and Le Charpentier rushed towards him, exclaiming :—"You dirty dog, I will crush you !" Seizing Jacques' wrists, he held them down. Panting, foaming with rage, he exclaimed :—"I will strangle you between my knees, but you shall not move. You shall implore pardon !"

"Implore your pardon ! Never ! Kill me if you can. My last word will be a curse on you. You coward ! You would like to have the compasses, but I shall have strangled you before that !"

Le Charpentier made an effort, snatched the compasses from his opponent's hands, got up, and brandished the weapon, crying :—

"Oh ! it's a struggle for life now, I must have your blood !"

The rain was falling in torrents, and the two men, their clothes saturated with the rain, slipped at each movement on the wooden pavement of the bridge—Jacques, knocked down by his adversary, felt that he was lost. He tried to invent a means of saving himself, but the minutes seemed like centuries to him. At last an idea flashed across his mind, and he put it into execution. With a rapid movement, he seized one of Le Charpentier's legs, his opponent, taken unawares, staggered, and fell on the parapet of the bridge.

"Oh ! the vermin," vociferated the colossus, dropping the compasses to catch hold of the hand-rail.

Jacques understood that his life now hung on a thread, gathering together all his strength, he made a supreme effort and succeeded in throwing Le Charpentier over the parapet. "Murder !" cried the unfortunate wretch. He was hanging over the seething waters, clinging to the joists of the parapet of the Bridge de l'Estacade. His hands slipped along the wet wood, he tightened his hold, trying in vain to bury his nails in the damp hand-rail. The wind blew him about, and his body hung in the air like a murderer on a gibbet. Le Charpentier was a robust man, his hands, used to handling heavy tools, were strong and sinewy ; after several desperate attempts he managed to catch hold of a beam. His two hands were joined, and, clasping the woodwork as in a vice, he tried to raise himself up, his strength increasing as the danger increased. His life was at stake, and his energy doubled in strength.

During this time, Linotte, still standing near Jacques, said to him in a

supplicating voice :—"I was mad, Jacques, but as you see, I have soon recovered. Come, my darling, let us run away." Jacques did not hear her. Unconscious of the crime he had just committed, breathless after the struggle, exhausted by the final efforts he had made, astonished by his success, he stood there, with haggard eyes, closed mouth, and clenched hands, not far from the spot where he had just rid himself of his enemy. He was just heaving a sigh of relief, when he stumbled—Le Charpentier had seized one of his legs. The parapet of the bridge was composed of two beams, one resting on the platform of the bridge, the other extending as high as the waist ; these two beams were crossed every two yards by rails in the form of an X, and it was to one of these that Le Charpentier was clinging. Seeing that Jacques was still there, he had made a supreme effort, raised himself up, sustained himself by one arm, and seized the leg of his enemy, who thought he was already drowned. Jacques' first move was to cling with one hand to the parapet, whilst with the other he struck his enemy on the head.

"Oh ! you shall pull me out or come with me," yelled Le Charpentier.

"Demon ! shall we never be done with you !"

"You must kill me first."

The frightful struggle then commenced once more in the darkness of the night, amidst the wind, the rain, the flashing of the lightning and the roaring of the thunder ; Le Charpentier still holding tight to the leg he had seized, Jacques striking heavy blows on his opponent's head. But this head was a tough one, and no one could say whether Jacques would get tired first or not. On seeing the man she thought was dead make his appearance again, Linotte felt afraid, as at a ghost, and stepped back a few paces. She then went up to Jacques and said :—"You will now see that you are the only man I love." Then, with a woman's cowardice, and the blindness of a lover, she took out her scissors and cut through Le Charpentier's fingers. Smarting from this terrible pain, the unfortunate man cried out in a piercing voice :—

"Murder ! Help ! Help !"

He released Jacques' leg in order to cling tighter to the beam, for he could no longer use his wounded hand. On hearing this cry, Jacques, frightened, but freer in his movements, struck him harder than ever full in the face, in order to silence him. The rain was still falling, and it was a terrible picture, this mortal struggle going on between these two men in the middle of this stormy night. Jacques' clothes were torn to pieces, and barely clung to his body ; the wet cloth was torn at each movement, displaying his steaming flesh. His face was covered with the traces of the blows he had received, blood was gushing from his eyes, ears and nose, and covering his torn clothes. Le Charpentier was still hanging on the other side of the parapet, his wet clothes making his body look longer and giving it the sharp silhouette of a corpse ; beneath this living hanging man, ran the dark stream, hardly reflecting the light of the gas-lamps, which gave but a feeble, flickering light. The heavy craft moored at the Estacade groaned as they ran foul of each other beneath the two combatants. On the bridge Linotte was kneeling down, handsomer than ever, notwithstanding the fierce light in her eyes ; with her hair matted over her forehead and cheeks in shining folds ; her contracted mouth displaying her clenched teeth, her skin shining in the rain, the sharp contour of her wet dress causing her to resemble those ivory statues so often seen in her churches. The rain was still falling, and the wind shook the trees in the

Jardin des Plantes and at the Entrepôt with tremendous force. In the silence of the night, amidst this terrible noise, Le Charpentier's cry rang out, clear and terrifying :—

"Murder ! Murder !"

He was horrible to look upon ; feeling his hands opening and losing their hold on the bridge, hopeless, hanging above this inky-black seething river, his eyes starting from their sockets, his lips foaming, his beard and hair standing up on end, he could already hear the fatal glouglou of the drowning man. He summoned all his strength and again cried out :—

"Murder ! Murder !"

And it was a lugubrious sound, amidst this tempest of thunder, wind and rain. Jacques, half-mad, frightened at this cry, which he thought would awaken all Paris, tired of this protracted struggle, in which he had twice thought himself vanquished, fearing that a saviour, an avenger, might arrive, carried away by the fact itself, no longer able to discern that what had been a fight would now be a murder, that it was not now a struggle, but a crime, mad with rage and hatred, exclaimed : " We must end this, let him die ! " And horrible to relate, he lifted his boot, and crushed the unfortunate Charpentier's fingers with his iron heel ! Linotte ejaculated :—" Go on, Jacques, I will cut his fingers one by one, rather than let him get up again, he must fall ! " And the blood-stained scissors did their hideous work. A last and terrible cry rang out ; the fall of the body into the water was heard, and that was all ! The rain and wind ceased, as if the elements had now nothing more to conceal. Jacques stood there stunned. Then he got up and looked over the parapet into the black waters in which Le Charpentier had just disappeared ; the current was breaking up the last circles which indicated the liquid tomb, a hard appeared, vainly trying to catch at some support ; it disappeared, the circles reappeared and disappeared ; a few bubbles seethed for a time and then burst—All was over !

Jacques, terrified, his hands clinging to the parapet, and his eyes fixed on the dark river, stood there with streaming forehead, (streaming, not with rain, but with perspiration). He could not tear himself from the spot. His eye now clearer, could see the corpse of the victim, lying in the mud, at the bottom of the river. Le Charpentier's last cry had terrified Linotte, she breathed with difficulty, her blood no longer circulated, a cold shiver ran through her whole frame, and the cry still buzzed in her ears ! The scissors fell from her hands, and the noise of the steel, striking the ground and falling into the water, made her start up in fright ! Jacques looked at her, their eyes sparkled and they both shivered. All at once they heard footsteps and some one saying :—

" It's there, on the Bridge de l'Estacade, they are still there ! " Trembling, the two assassins looked at each other. The footsteps got closer every moment. It was Linotte who first awoke to the danger of their position ; peering through the gloom, she saw a group of people running towards them ; there was not a moment to lose, so seizing Jacques' arm, she dragged him away, in the direction of the Hotel Lambert, saying to him in a hoarse voice :—

" Be quick, they have seen us ! "

" I have murdered him ! " said Jacques.

" No," replied Linotte, " you simply fought with him, he attacked you first."

" Murdered ! " murmured the miserable man, following his companion.

"But you must walk quicker!" exclaimed the latter, "they are on the bridge."

"I am a murderer," repeated Jacques, not hearing what his accomplice said to him, allowing her to lead him away.

But the people following them had run very quickly, and just as the two criminals were leaving the Bridge and arriving on the quay, three policemen rushed forward and seized them. Linotte struggled, and tried to run away.

"Let me alone," she exclaimed, "I have done nothing. They had a fight, and I had nothing to do with it. Let me alone, I won't be arrested, I want to go home."

"Be quiet and say nothing," said the policemen, "or we will gag you and put the 'bracelets' on."

"Oh! sir, I assure you I have done nothing."

Jacques, on the contrary, accepted his fate. As soon as he felt the policeman's hand on his shoulder, he said:—

"Yes, it was I who murdered him."

"Did you know him?"

"Yes, we had a fight, he wanted to kill me, but it was I who killed him."

"And this woman?"

"What woman?"

"You know her?"

"Ah! Linotte!"

"You see, you were with them," said the policeman, turning to Linotte.

"Yes, sir, it's true. I was with Jacques, but I have done nothing."

"No, sir," said Jacques, in all sincerity, for he had not seen how Linotte had helped him, "it's my mistress, and the quarrel arose about her; Le Charpentier wanted to entice her away from me; but she has done nothing. On the contrary, for whilst on the bridge, before the fight commenced, she persuaded me to run away."

"Let her come all the same," said the policeman who appeared to be taking the lead. "To-morrow at daylight, we can arrange what to do."

Linotte commenced crying, but the policemen were used to tears, and promptly took them both off to the Saint-Paul Police Station. The culprits were arrested, the police had done their duty; but though they might perhaps have saved the victim, they did not even give him a thought. That is one of the faults of the French Administration, they punish, but do not prevent crime. The next day Jacques was transferred to Mazas, whilst Linotte was released.

II.

EXACTLY two months after the horrible scene we have just described, and opposite the same ball-room on the Quai de la Rapée where this story opens, the summer sun was just disappearing, when a smart brougham pulled up at the entrance to the ball-room. A young, handsome and elegantly dressed woman got out and entered the brilliantly lighted ball-room, where every one's attention was attracted by the new-comer.

"It's Linotte!" exclaimed several, who recognised her, and immediately trooped up to her. The women, her former friends, looked at her at first with envy and hatred, then getting somewhat softened on seeing the reception she met with, they came up and greeted her with the greatest cordiality.

"Ah! here you are at last, Linotte!" said one of them, "we couldn't imagine what had become of you."

"I wanted to see you all again!" replied Linotte, "for I had not forgotten you, and good fortune has made no change in me."

"Oh! no," whispered one of the women, "that wouldn't make her any better, she has come here to show off before us."

"So the lawsuit is settled?" asked one of the gentlemen.

"Yes, a fortnight ago."

"You got nothing?"

"Of course not, they could do nothing to me, I was acquitted, besides, I had done nothing. Jacques was a scoundrel who wanted me to go with Le Charpentier, I was running away from him when they arrested me."

"What a wretch!" exclaimed the women. "With his sanctimonious looks, he was capable of anything."

"And what did he get?"

"Ten years," said Linotte, carelessly.

"Is that all!"

"Oh! he quite deserved all he got."

"But do you know that you are a real swell, Linotte!"

"Rather!" said the girl, taking from her pocket a small mirror mounted in brilliants, looking at herself complacently, and arranging her hair. "This affair brought me into notoriety, and an Englishman longed to make my acquaintance. He wrote me more than twenty letters during the trial, and got them delivered to me whilst I was in prison, for they had sent me back to prison."

"To prison! poor Linotte!"

"The day of my acquittal, he came and fetched me, and installed me in a very pretty little house, where I have carriages, horses and servants; he then introduced some people, and they play for very high stakes. I've come to see you this evening, but cannot stop long, my guests arrive at ten o'clock; I shall just dance a quadrille and then go home."

Linotte was afflicted with what the celebrated dramatist, Emile Angier, calls *la nostalgie de la boue*, that is to say, a longing for her former miserable existence; she had everything the most fastidious woman could wish for, and young and elegant admirers crowded her drawing-room, but that did not satisfy her, she was born on a dunghill, and could not help returning to it from time to time.

"Come," said she, taking off her mantle, and displaying to perfection the beauty of her figure, and the elegance of her dress. "Who is going to dance with me?"

"I! I!" exclaimed several gentlemen.

"It shall be you, Augustin," said she, taking the arm of a tall fellow who was gazing at her in a melancholy way, "you were always Jacques' friend."

"And I am so still."

"You are quite right," said she, laying her head on his shoulder.

"Poor Jacques!" said the young man, leading Linotte into the middle of the ball-room in order to get away from those who were surrounding them. They took their places opposite the orchestra, and whilst waiting for the dance to commence, Augustin said:

"I saw Jacques at La Roquette yesterday!"

"Ah!" said Linotte in an indifferent tone of voice, arranging her hair before the small mirror; "and what had he got to say?"

"He told me that he exonerated you in order to save you."

"Yes, it seems to me that he only did his duty!"

"So you didn't love him, Linotte!"

"Yes. I was very fond of him, I never said any harm about him!"

"But during the trial?"

"It wasn't my fault, my lawyer made me say what I did."

"You caused him to be condemned!"

"Yes, but that caused my acquittal, and Jacques ought not to blame me, he knows I have not a bad opinion of him. He's a good fellow!"

Jacques' friend bit his lips. He expected to find a grateful woman, but found nothing but indifference and forgetfulness. This woman who had led his friend into crime, and acted as his accomplice, had forgotten him! Such is the singular nature of these women; when she said she loved Jacques, it was true, but her affection only lasted for a short time, when the lover went away, the love she felt for him disappeared also. At the ball, two months after their courtship, she had forgotten everything; and even told herself sometimes that she must have been very stupid to compromise herself as she had done for him.

"But all this must have tormented you," resumed Augustin, "you must feel a certain remorse."

"Why so?"

"Do you not feel sorry for what has taken place?"

"Not at all!"

"What!"

"How stupid you are! Far from injuring me, it has done me good. Without that I should never be in my present prosperous condition. —Come and call on me one of these days, you will see for yourself. —To tell you the truth, I fancy my Englishman has done all this to open a gambling saloon. But what does that matter to me, since I reap the benefit."

"Where do you live?"

"In the Champs Elysées. Will you come this evening?"

"Yes; what name have you assumed?"

"Oh! a swell name, Jeanne de Sillac."

"Really, that's very modest!" said Augustin, laughing.

"Take your places, ladies and gentlemen, take your places!" cried the M.C.'s.

The quadrille commenced, and as Linotte was known to be a splendid dancer, there was quite a crowd round her. When the quadrille was finished, they carried her in triumph to her carriage; she got in and, inviting Augustin to take his place beside her, said to the footman:

"Home."

"Poor Jacques," said the other ladies, "he is quite forgotten!"

"Fortunately," murmured Augustin, and they drove off at a rapid rate towards the Champs Elysées.

III.

THE house occupied by Linotte was situated in one of the streets leading out of the Champs Elysées, and had been hired, furnished, by the month, by the gentleman whom the simple girl took to be an Englishman. The sumptuous furniture revealed all the bad taste so often displayed in the

houses furnished and let by the month to the transient celebrities of the public balls. Not the slightest unity of design ; styles, woods, and epochs were all mixed up ; there was no resemblance between the colours of the hangings and those of the chairs and sofa. The house cost fifteen hundred francs a month, and the carriage three hundred francs. The man whom Linotte had taken for a rich Englishman was nothing but a vulgar speculator, who had hired the house simply to open a clandestine gaming saloon, to attract simple country people and foreigners who wanted to make the acquaintance of the celebrated woman, the friend of the murderer of the Estacade, who was supposed to be under the protection of an English lord, under the name of Jeanne de Sillac. Linotte's new friend had nothing English about him but his costume ; he was a Parisian, living in the Rue Mouffetard, his name was Lorémond ; and he had commenced his career by singing English songs in the streets. Wishing to try his luck, and being quite regardless of the law, he had taken a trip to England, for a purpose which was never known, and returned to France with papers which transformed his name into "Lord Eymond." When Linotte and her companion arrived at the former's house, Lord Eymond was doing the honours of his establishment to several early arrivals. On seeing Augustin with Linotte, he knitted his brows, came towards them, and asked her in a low tone :

"Who is this gentleman?"

"An old friend of mine."

"You should not have brought him this evening. You might have invited him in the day-time, when you are alone."

"Ah ! you know our arrangement, I intend to be free to do as I like."

"You ought to have asked him to come in a different costume then."

"Oh ! I am not particular."

"That's just what I complain of."

"After all, I don't care ; I have told you, and I tell you again : I shall do as I like ; you can't make me give up my old friends just because I am a little richer. I don't care how my friends are dressed ; so much the worse for those who don't like it."

Lord Eymond was greatly annoyed, especially as she was talking loud enough for everyone to hear her ; however, he resolved to let her have her way, so shrugging his shoulders, and bowing, he said :

"You are right, my dear," then smiling, he muttered, "What a caution she is !"

The French word he made use of was very expressive, and one that no Englishman would have used ; had Linotte heard it she would have known he was not a son of Albion. She then turned round, and shook hands with Augustin, saying :

"I must leave you for a minute ; make yourself at home, take a good look round, I must go and look after my guests, they will soon commence play."

The guests took but very little notice of the host and hostess when they came in ; but went and took their seats at an immense table covered with a green cloth which stood in the middle of the room, just as if they had been in a public gaming saloon. Augustin, who felt rather awkward, had ensconced himself in an armchair in a corner of the room, and sat watching the strange people around him. Lord Eymond, after having had the cards brought in, came towards Linotte and said :

"My dear Jeanne, will you begin a game?"

"Certainly," said she, taking his arm, and going towards the table, at which their places were reserved.

The game commenced at once, Lord Eymond taking the cards. Any one else but Linotte would have seen the part they were making her play, but she had seen nothing of life but what is to be learnt in a workroom. Her idea of a sumptuously furnished house was the one occupied by her late employer, that is to say a house of three or four cleanly kept rooms, with ebony or mahogany furniture, bedroom, dining-room, and shop. Now, the house they had hired for her was a palace in comparison. She had read that at parties, at the clubs, heavy sums were lost, a part of the guests danced whilst the others played cards. They did the same thing at her house; they danced sometimes, but played cards every night. The game was becoming serious, and Augustin, somewhat surprised to see so much gold on the table, determined to watch the players. He soon saw that each time Linotte's turn came, it was Lord Eymond who passed her the cards, and he suspected that the *soi-disant* Englishman, instead of handing her the cards belonging to the game, gave her some taken from his pocket. Augustin saw this plainly, for he had been assistant to Brunnet, the conjuror. This explained Linotte's luck, she always had the best cards. Acting on Lord Eymond's advice, she would sometimes retire, as if ashamed of her good luck; and the game at once changed entirely. During a temporary suspension of play, Augustin asked Linotte:

"Why doesn't your English friend play?"

"He is very gallant, and lets me play for him; if I lose, he pays, but when I win, we share proceeds."

Augustin at once understood what Lord Eymond really was. The game was then resumed, and about three o'clock in the morning, Augustin went away; having his business to attend to, he was obliged to go and get a little sleep. He had got out of the house, and was carefully noticing its number and general appearance, in case he should want to call again, when he suddenly perceived a dozen individuals go up to the house and rush in, leaving four policemen outside to guard the doors. Astonished, and feeling greatly perplexed, he determined to wait a few minutes to see what was going on. Inside the house, the gambling still continued. Linotte, who was in high spirits, exclaimed:

"I give up, I have won too much money!" and she plunged her hand into the heap of gold lying before her, almost intoxicated by the sight of so much of the precious metal. All at once the doors were thrown open with great violence, a commissary, wearing his sash, appeared and said:

"Let no one stir!"

And the ten policemen rushed into the room. The candles at once went out, as if by enchantment, and the windows and doors were opened and shut in the dark. Linotte cried out, for a hand had slipped beneath hers and plunged in the gold. Someone was robbing her of her winnings. She tried to defend herself, and her gold, but she was knocked down, and the money disappeared. Cries and oaths were heard on all sides, and an indescribable tumult reigned for about ten minutes, after which the policemen appeared at all the doors and windows by which the gamblers were trying to escape; the commissary soon discovered the table had been cleared, and everything taken away. Sitting down in Linotte's seat, he said:

"There are policemen at every door and window, on the stairs, in the

courtyard, and in the street, so don't try to escape, but answer my questions frankly."

Two men sat down beside him, and produced writing materials, whilst the commissary asked :

"Where is Hippolyte Lorémont?"

"Lord Eymond!" cried the gamblers, looking for their host, who was no longer present.

"The scoundrel has run away!" exclaimed Linotte, "and it's he who has stolen my money!"

After a rapid examination, four women, who could give no satisfactory account of themselves, were arrested, and Linotte was one of them. They were the regular frequenters of these gambling saloons, which will never be put down until gambling is authorized in France, and we get establishments like Monaco, where gaming is conducted in a proper manner.

PART I

THE BURGLARS OF THE SEINE.

I.

THE windows of the Château de Beçon were lighted up by the red rays of the setting sun. Everything was calm, the water, the woods, and the fields were as quiet as at midnight, and the heavy and ugly silhouette of the old château stood out clearly on the grey horizon. It was about eight o'clock, and the warm evening air was very refreshing after the burning heat of this June day. The leaves of the trees on the Ile de la Grande-Jatte were motionless, and the long grass stood straight up in the air; not a breath of wind; on the island, not a sound. As far as the eye could reach, and one could see as far as Suresnes, the water, reflecting the rays of the setting sun, mingled with the purple sky. Nothing was stirring, either on the banks or on the river; anyone walking on the island at this moment would have been seized with a melancholy fit, everything was so still, quiet and deserted. Not a single couple of lovers—those eternal idlers along the banks of the river—could be seen, arm-in-arm, their faces close together, to drink up with delight, the sharp odour of the water, and the rude perfume of the woods and of the new-mown lucerne. Nature was splendid, with this striking contrast of light and shade, but this part of the island was really lugubrious!

Half-past eight had just struck, when a whistle was heard three times, and a head sprung up from the long grass, looking eagerly round; everything being all right, a body then appeared! An immense body, as long as a lamp-post; a body, which, in the darkness, could not be distinguished from the trees. Sure of being alone, the individual who had so suddenly appeared put two fingers in his mouth and whistled, ending up with a modulation, then peering in the direction of the Seine, and seeing a boat with two men in it leave the opposite side of the river he said to himself: "There he is!" And he strode off, towards the corner of the island. He soon reached a small tavern, the doors and windows of which were closed. He whistled again, and three individuals immediately appeared, as if by enchantment; they crawled along towards the door of the tavern, and there found the long individual who had whistled them. As soon as they got close to him he said:

"There he is, are you ready?"

"Yes; Petite is close to the house."

"She hasn't left her post?"

"There's no fear of her moving when once she is stationed anywhere!"

The man who replied thus was the very opposite to the one who had whistled. The latter was ugly, and we do not mean to say the other one

was an Adonis, as the reader will see. He was called Grosbouleau on account of the rotundity of his body. He was of middle height, but a precocious and unhealthy obesity had swelled him out; polite people, who do not always speak the truth, said he was *fat*; we, who are frank, say he was *bloated*. In his immense face twinkled two big round eyes, his nose was large, and the ends of the cartilage were buried in his hairy nostrils; his lips were thick and protruding; his chin was buried in three folds of fat, and his cranium, totally denuded, was surrounded by a crown of dark hair. Having presented Grosbouleau to our readers, we must now introduce his friend, who rejoiced in the name of Lalongueur; familiarly, "The Long'un."

As we have said he was as wiry as a terrier, his nose was small, and so flat that it covered the greater part of his cheeks; his eyes were round, and the pupils were red, without eyelids or eyebrows; under his immense nostrils, grew a patch of stiff and rough hair like the whiskers of a cat, his mouth, with its very small lips, resembled that of a pike; his hair was carrotty, his forehead, cheeks and chin were bony, and his neck tanned and intersected with great blue veins. They were both dressed alike; blouse, duck trousers, and peaked cap.

"Go to the house at once!" said Lalongueur, to the other two individuals, "we will rejoin you presently with the baron. Prowl around the house, for they make frequent excursions in the neighbourhood since that affair at the house near the bridge."

"Must we go in different directions?"

"Yes, Nitard will go towards the great point, and you on the opposite side."

"Where shall I find Lichet?" asked the man they called Nitard.

"At the house; and above all, don't speak to Petite."

"Very good."

Nitard and Lichet then went off, each one to the spot mentioned. When Grosbouleau and Lalongueur were left to themselves, the latter sat down beside his companion, and said:

"What's the matter with you to-day? You look troubled."

"The fact is, things are not going on as they ought, we might do good business, and we are doing nothing, and we are risking our lives more and more every day."

"Why is that?"

"Why? Because there is no organisation. To do a job, there are four, six, and sometimes eight of us; two would suffice, whereas we always have ten to share the proceeds."

"Whose fault is it, not mine?"

"No, it isn't your fault, nor mine, and yet we are both to blame for it."

"How's that?"

"Are we wide awake or not?" asked Grosbouleau.

"We are," replied Lalongueur, in a convinced tone.

"Well, how is it the baron comes and does the work when it is all prepared and ready for him? What's the use of those two idiots, Nitard and Lichet? I don't mind Petite, she is young, and knows all about linen, etc.; were she not with us we should take a lot of worthless things and leave valuables; besides, a woman is always handy, and she often cheers up our dull days."

"Well, listen to me, Grosbouleau; I won't mince matters with you; if you like, this shall be the last job we do with the baron, we will set up for ourselves."

"Seriously?"

"My word of honour, 'ere's my 'and," said Lalongueur, giving his long bony hand, into which his friend immediately thrust his fat leg of-mutton fist, saying:

"It's understood, this is the last job!"

"With them."

"Of course, we'll talk that over at the 'Peau de Lapin.'"

"Right. Ten o'clock at the 'Peau de Lapin.' Mum's the word, I can hear the boat."

And indeed the boat had arrived opposite the tavern, and a man jumped ashore after having carefully looked around him. He then said to the boatman:

"Go up the river a little way and come back again at once; if you see anything suspicious, let us know."

"All right; I'll wait opposite the house."

"Yes, that's it."

The boatman, turning his wherry round, rowed up the Seine. The man who had been steering plunged into the long grass and took the path leading to the tavern, and was soon with the men who were waiting for him. On seeing him, Lalongueur and Grosbouleau got up and took off their caps.

"Well?" asked the man.

"They are all here, and waiting for you," said Grosbouleau.

"Have they examined the house?"

"Yes, Monsieur the baron, there hasn't been a soul there since yesterday, every one is in Paris. It's good business, the place is as well furnished as if it were a town house."

"Has information been obtained?"

"Yes, I did that, monsieur," said Lalongueur; "the owner of the house is a wealthy merchant, in the Rue d'Enghien."

"But," said Grosbouleau, "as the police poke their noses everywhere, and there are sometimes policemen sleeping like thieves in the open air, we can't carry the things, so Lalongueur has brought a boat."

"Where is it?"

"At the little point," said Lalongueur.

"But you will be obliged to go up as far as Suresnes."

"Yes, but we know a spot."

"Very good," said the baron, "I have another boat, in the lock, near the great point, you can load that one as well."

"Nitard and Lichet can do that, we will look after the other one."

"All right. Make haste, night is coming on."

"Everything is ready, we were only waiting for you."

"Let's go then."

Lalongueur took his chum's arm, and squeezed it in a peculiar manner, as they walked along. The baron walked behind them, and they looked like three men strolling along the riverside to enjoy the cool evening breeze. Lalongueur whispered to Grosbouleau:—

"We shall have sufficient to-night to set ourselves up in business."

"Hush, I understand," replied the other, in a whisper.

It was quite dark when the baron and his companions stopped before a small one-storied private house, the unique floor being approached by means of six or seven steps. It contained three rooms:—a drawing-room, a bedroom, and a kitchen, all well furnished. Built in the middle of a garden, the house was enclosed by a rather low wall, flanked by an iron

gate. A young girl between seventeen and eighteen years old, who seemed to have spent her evening in gathering the immense bouquet of wild flowers she had in her hand, came towards them as soon they appeared.

"Well, Petite, is there anything fresh?" asked Lalongueur.

"Nothing, I have seen no one since seven o'clock."

"Come, let's be quick," said the baron, and on perceiving Nitard and Lichet, who had just arrived, he added:—"Do you two keep watch."

They immediately returned, peering into every thicket to see that no one was about. Grosboubleau took his stand close to the wall, Lalongueur climbed on his shoulders, got on to the wall and jumped over into the garden so quickly that it seemed as easy to him as walking upstairs. A few minutes later, the gate was opened, Lalongueur having unscrewed the lock. The girl and three men went in, leaving two others outside. They had no trouble in opening the front door, and found the house prettily furnished, a bedroom, upholstered in blue silk, a drawing-room with handsome oak furniture, and a dining-room equally well furnished; all fresh and pretty. The pillage commenced immediately. The men ransacked the drawers, whilst the girl devoted her attention to the linen, choosing the best, and throwing aside anything of no value. Nitard and the boatman carried the plunder to the boat moored opposite Courbevoie, Lalongueur carried the parcels made up by his chum to their boat concealed in the small creek. The baron ransacked the drawers of the secretary for any papers he could find; and had already cleared nearly everything off the chimney piece when he noticed a photograph hanging near the looking-glass. Putting his candle close to the photograph, he looked at it attentively, trying to remember when he had seen the original, and murmuring:—"I know that fellow—I've seen his face somewhere."

He leant up against the mantelpiece, buried his face in his hands, and again tried to recall to mind the face in the photograph. "Ah!" said he all at once, "I have it; but yet it can't be!" and he looked round at the luxurious room, then turning to the photograph again, he said:—"and yet it must be—Ah! but that would be a really good stroke of business!" Then turning round to Lalongueur, he said:—

"I say, you obtained the information about this house; did they tell you the name of the owner?"

"Yes, he's a commission merchant in the Rue d'Enghien, and soon about to retire from business—"

"And his name?"

"Bénard or Bérard."

"Bénard or Bérard," repeated the baron, trying to remember the name, then taking out his pocket-book, he wrote:—"Bénard or Bérard, Commission Merchant, Rue d'Enghien."

"What! do you want to sell him what you are going to take from here?"

"That's my business," replied the baron, sharply.

Grosboubleau smiled maliciously, and whispered to his friend:—

"Yes, and he will be able to have it all to himself after to-night."

Lalongueur glanced at him, and shook his hand in sign of approval. The parcels of linen, and the bronzes had been taken away, and the thieves were about to take the looking-glasses down, when they heard a whistle. The candles were at once put out, and everything was quiet in the house. They then heard some one coming up the front steps, and soon saw a man's shadow in the doorway, and heard a voice saying:—

"Quick, get away, there's a patrol coming!"

"Send the boat away," said the baron.

"But," said Lalongueur, "if you send the boats away, we shall be caught in a trap."

"Pray be easy, I have another boat at the Point, whilst the goods are going to Courbevoie, we shall go to Asnières."

"But the other boat?"

"It's true. Well, you and Grosbouléau can take it; Nitard, Lichet and Petite will come with me."

"That's it—quick, let's each take a parcel."

"No, no, you risk being caught."

Obedient to the orders given them by their chief, they all stole out and directed their steps towards the Point. Just as Petite was coming out of the house, she felt some one pull her arm, and was about to call out, when she recognised Grosbouléau who whispered to her:—

"Come with us, Petite, we have something to say to you."

She followed them, whilst the others rejoined the baron. They found the boat there, all ready to start; and were getting in when the baron exclaimed:—

"But where's Petite?"

"She's with Lalongueur."

"She's all right then, push off."

He took the rudder, Lichet took the oars, and they started for Asnières. Lalongueur and Grosbouléau took Petite to their boat, and, once on board, Lalongueur seized the boathook, and hauled the boat along the riverside in a manner which denoted that he was accustomed to the work. Grosbouléau, seated next to Petite, said:—

"We are going to leave the baron, and set up for ourselves, will you join us?"

"You know very well, Eugène, that I will not leave you," replied the young girl.

"You're an angel!" exclaimed Eugène, implanting a noisy kiss on Petite's pale cheek. During this time, the baron's boat stopped close to the railway quay at Asnières; the baron gave his men two napoleons, saying:—

"I am going to Paris at once, there are twenty francs each, dine here, and come to the old spot, we shall all meet there."

The men touched their caps, and the baron hurried off to the railway station; on seeing the time by the station clock, he said to himself:—"Ten o'clock, I may catch her this evening." He jumped into a train, and, on arriving in Paris, took a cab, and ordered the man to drive to 54 Rue des Martyrs.

II.

THE house in the Rue des Martyrs at which the baron called was composed of furnished apartments, except the shop on the ground floor, and the first storey. The mezzanine floor was occupied by the landlady who also fulfilled the functions of doorkeeper. She was called Belida, from the fact that in her young days she had been known as the Belle Ida, but to look at her now, no one would have supposed that she had been one of the favourite stars of Mabilles and Tivoli. When the baron knocked at her window, she opened it and asked:—

"What can I do for you?"

"Madame, I shall be glad if you will favour me with a few minutes' conversation."

After minutely inspecting her visitor from head to foot, Belida said with a most engaging smile:

"Pray come in, sir."

She gave the baron a chair, and sitting opposite him, raised the lamp shade so as to throw the light full in his face; whilst her own remained in the shade. This manœuvre made the baron smile, but did not annoy him; sitting down he said:—

"I think Madame de Sillac lives here?"

"Yes, sir, a charming lady."

"The fact is, madame, I knew a family of that name, fifteen years ago; having heard that a Madame de Sillac lived here I thought and hoped I knew her; and I have come to ascertain whether I am mistaken or not."

"Sir," said the doorkeeper, "you are a gentleman, and it is my duty to answer you frankly; people in our set understand each other at once."

Belida had a mania for considering herself the equal of those gentlemen who used to invite her to supper. The baron did not move a muscle; if he did not feel flattered, he certainly did not feel insulted by the old girl's pretensions.

"Madame de Sillac," she continued, "has not been in my house long, but still I know her very well."

"Oh! madame, I do not ask you anything about her except her appearance."

"Just so. She is about twenty-eight or thirty—for young men—as for myself I take her to be between thirty-five and thirty-six—she is handsome, very handsome, graceful, and amiable. Ah! if you talk to me about a distinguished manner you know as well as I do that such a thing is no longer necessary for a woman's success; on the contrary, she has not a distinguished air, but she is a pretty woman, and I am astonished she should be in her present precarious position. She has sparkling eyes, lovely teeth, and beautiful hair."

"Dark?" asked the baron.

"It was dark, but she has imitated the others, and had it dyed yellow. She has a pretty figure, as I told you, but her hands are rather coarse, and her feet and ankles are rather large."

"Her eyes are black?"

"Yes, quite black."

"Hasn't she a mark on her face?"

"A mark; let me see—"

"A mark on the left cheek."

"Yes, you are right, she calls it a beauty spot."

"Sir," said Belida in an affected tone, "my gossip does not go so far as talebearing. I let my rooms to a lady, she pays me; and I do not ask her whether she has a private fortune."

"Excuse me, madame, but if, as I hope and believe, this lady is the person I am looking for, I am interested in knowing her real position."

"That's another thing. If you belong to the family, I need hide nothing from you. I believe, or rather I know that she is in the greatest poverty. My last fortnight's rent is not paid, and the present fortnight is nearly expired. I know I am talking to a gentleman, or would not tell you this. I have even threatened to turn her out."

The baron knew all he wanted to know ; uncertain whether Belida was the doorkeeper or the principal tenant, and judging from the appearance of the room, he took a ten franc piece from his pocket and placed it on the table. The old woman saw this, and said with a smile :

"The fortnight's rent amounts to twenty francs, sir."

The baron looked at her in astonishment, but added another ten francs, and asked her to show him up to the room. The old girl took her lamp and preceded the baron on to the fourth storey, knocked at a door, and cried out :

"Jeanne, there's a gentleman asking for you." She went away when the door opened.

"Madame de Sillac?" asked the baron.

"I'm Madame de Sillac," said the lady who opened the door. And knitting her brows somewhat, she tried to divine who her visitor was.

"Can you listen to me for a few minutes?"

"Come in, sir."

And the young woman, preceding the visitor, gave him a chair and took a seat opposite him. Jeanne de Sillac was doubtless just going out, for she was wearing a silk dress, which rustled at every movement, her head was adorned with a large hat, and her face was covered with a veil, which she raised while talking to the baron. The latter looked at her for a few minutes in astonishment, and appeared to be trying to recall the past ; Belida had been very indulgent in describing her tenant, who, not at all confident in her beauty, was made up frightfully. Her white, powdered cheeks were touched up with a patch of rouge, her lips, of a glaring red, were thick and depressed at the corners, her coal-black eyes rolled in their orbits without the slightest lustre, and her heavy, swarthy eyelids were edged with black like mourning writing-paper. Her eyebrows and eyelashes had been painted with a crayon, and her hair, which Belida had praised so highly, was shiny with pomade and highly perfumed, looking as if it had been snatched from the cranium of a dead or dying woman. Her long fingers were tinged with yellow at the tips, as if from the habit of making cigarettes. Beneath all this white lead, grease and paint, the baron was trying to recognise the woman he had formerly known. Embarrassed by this look and this silence, Jeanne said : "But what do you want with me, sir?" The baron, looking round, and seeing they were quite alone, took up the lamp, placed it close to his face, and said to the girl :

"Do you recognise me, Linotte?"

The young girl remained speechless for several seconds, gazing intently at her visitor, then clapping her hands, she exclaimed :

"The Englishman !"

"Yes, the Englishman."

"That is to say the Parisian Englishman, my lawsuit revealed to me who you were."

"I know that ; you learnt that I was a sharp fellow, in the first place ; you know me, but I know you, much better than those who tried and condemned you. So you see we can talk freely together."

"Freely if you like, but softly, for the partitions are very thin here, and we can hear from one room to another."

"Do you know that you have not changed much, that you are still as handsome as ever."

"Oh ! don't speak of that, I do not ask you to tell me any falsehoods.

The sixteen years that have elapsed since we met have left their trace on my face. That's not what you came to speak to me about, I presume?"

"No, but before talking of business, I wanted to speak of the past."

"Pray do not speak about that," said Linotte, shivering. "It's worse than the present, which is saying a good deal."

"Have you suffered much?"

"Oh! yes. I can assure you!"

"And what from?"

"From poverty, hunger, cold, and ill-treatment, from the world's scorn, and my own remorse," replied the unfortunate Linotte, in a voice which touched even the baron's hard heart.

"Poor girl!" said he, "and did you never think of avenging yourself for all this?"

"Avenge yourself for what and on whom? Besides, can a woman like me avenge herself? Even when we do defend ourselves we are always wrong, and get punished."

"I am not speaking of a brutal vengeance which would open the eyes of the prying police, but of a skilful and secret vengeance!"

"Who gave you my address?"

"I heard your name mentioned at a second-hand clothes shop kept by Madame Chaineau."

"Ah! Madame Chaineau, the old thief. She has done me a deal of harm!"

"She shall do you no further harm, if we come to an understanding. In the first place, Linotte, you must answer my questions in a straightforward way."

"That's according to what they are."

"They will be put to you in your own interest."

"Well, go on."

"You are poor?"

"Oh, yes," said Linotte, shaking her head dolefully, "very poor, too poor in fact."

"Though I did not like to tell you, the fact is you have greatly changed."

"What would you say if you could hear me coughing in the morning."

"You can't live long as you are living now."

"It's true," said the girl cynically; "some professions get better as time goes on, with ours it's just the contrary."

"That's why I have come to propose an affair to you."

"If it's an affair which might lead to my returning to prison, I decline it."

"No, it's something that you alone can do."

"Honest?"

"Well, that depends how you look at it."

"There are two sorts of honesty, then?"

"Yes, the one which consists in respecting the civil code, and the other in which conscience is our only guide."

"But it is not the latter you are referring to?"

"Certainly not, I'm speaking of the former; you have not become so straightlaced as all that."

"I have become very respectful towards the Law--Tell me what this affair is."

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Yes, I am hungry, you look at me; yes, hungry, I have eaten nothing

since the day before yesterday because I have not a farthing in the house ; I have nothing to conceal from you, and may confess that I am going to Brébant's in the hope that some friend will stand me a good supper."

"You really astound me !"

"Oh ! I've been worse off than that even."

"I have a little money, can I assist you ?"

"Certainly, give me twenty francs, and you can talk as long as you like. I shall not go out to-night."

But the baron only gave her ten francs, and she at once sent Belida to fetch some dinner. Returning and taking her place near the baron, she took off her hat, and said !—

"Now, I am all attention, I feel lighter-hearted, knowing that I shall dine this evening."

"This is the affair in two words ; we are both possessed of a terrible secret."

"I !"

"Yes, and on that secret depends the present, the future, the family and the fortune of a man ; if we go about it skilfully, we can obtain at least half of what he possesses."

"How ?"

"If you like to share with me, Linotte, I'll arrange everything."

"There's no risk of prison ?"

"I have more reason than you have for not wishing to get caught ; but the affair is honest."

"Honest, as regards the law."

"Yes, have you any scruples ?"

"No, I accept."

"Well, look."

The baron then drew from his pocket-book the photograph he had stolen from the house on the Ile de la Grande Jatte, and handed it to Linotte.

"Oh !" exclaimed the latter, looking at the portrait.

"I was not mistaken, was I ? It's he !"

"Yes, and he's alive !"

"He is alive, rich and respected, with a town house and country seat, but he has never thought of you, and you know all about his past life."

"Well ?" asked Linotte.

"Well, if he wants to keep what he has got, he must purchase our silence. Do you understand ?"

The unfortunate woman remained plunged in thought for several minutes, then said in a hoarse voice, as if speaking in spite of herself :

"No, no ! never of him."

"No !" repeated the baron, looking at the girl, then, coming round the table, he leant over the back of her chair, and said in a similar tone to what she had employed :

"Linotte, are you going mad ? What idiotic scruples are these ? when there was a crime to commit, he chose you. Is he not the cause of your present miserable position ? When he recovered his position did he think of you ? You may die of hunger, but he is happy ; you may be crushed by the world's scorn, but he, the real culprit, is happy, honoured and respected ! And yet you loved him dearly, for you sacrificed everything for him !"

"Ah ! yes, I did love him," repeated Linotte, more to persuade herself of what she was saying than to consecrate the souvenir of what had been.

"Whilst he lives in happiness, you, though acquitted, are condemned to punishment harder than his, for you are never sure of earning your daily bread. It's he who ruined you, and it's he, the culprit, who condemned you ; you fell through him, and you can never recover your former position."

"It's true," she murmured, forcing herself to believe what she knew were nothing but falsehoods.

"If you like, you can be rich to-morrow, and quit the miserable life you are leading ; you will be sure of a roof over your head, it will only cost him a guest chamber the less at his country house ; you will not be obliged to stay all night at the café, waiting with empty stomach, for the doors to open, in order to be able to go to your room without disturbing the door-keeper, to whom you owe a fortnight's rent."

"But what will he say when he sees me?"

"He will be frightened ! There's another secret respecting the rapid fortune this man has made, and his sudden metamorphosis, I shall know what it is to-morrow—Is it understood, Linotte?"

The girl did not reply, but cowering in her armchair, with her elbows on her knees, and her eyes fixed on the ground, she appeared to be meditating. The baron watched her closely for a few seconds, then smiling to himself, he took up his hat, and said :

"Linotte, I will give you to-night and to-morrow to decide. To-morrow I will come and fetch you and we will dine together. Good-bye."

Jeanne heard him, but made no reply. The baron went out, and on going downstairs met Belida, who was taking up the young girl's dinner.

"Madame," said he, "I have not paid Jeanne's rent, you can claim it from her, to-night and to-morrow as well."

"Ah ! you are coming back to-morrow," said the old woman with a malicious look, "don't be afraid, this very evening I shall threaten to keep her keys if I am not paid before to-morrow evening."

"That's exactly what I meant."

"When one has lived in the same society, one understands with half a word."

When the baron got into the street, he said to himself :—"Who would have thought it ? She has certain scruples. Now to-morrow I must ascertain how this change of position came about. I can learn that from Lanout whilst terminating the Asnières business."

III.

WHILST the baron is being driven to Montparnasse to the "Peau de Lapin," we will briefly describe the gentleman to our readers. The Baron de Lorémont who appeared in the prologue, continued to ring the changes on his name. He had at first transformed Lorémont into Lord Eymond, then, having been placed at the head of a Financial Company, he had been obliged to take the title of baron ; his old friends called him "Lord Eymond" and his new ones, "the baron ;" hence they had gradually got to call him "Baron de Lorémont." Those who had known him for some time, no longer spoke to him, and, astonished to see him get out of the singular affairs he engaged in, whilst all the others were caught, they added a fresh title to his name ; "The Spy." But they only whispered that, for he was said to be brave. He was strong and agile, and this imposed on people who might have been tempted to talk too loud about him,

Always dressed with care, if not absolutely elegant, the baron was a little military looking man, with an insolent stare, his forehead being marked with a large scar. He walked very upright so as to appear tall, and wore at his button-hole the ribbon of the Legion of Honour, obtained according to his friends, under the following peculiar circumstances.

On the evening of the 3rd December, 1851, Lorémont presented himself at the Prefecture of Police, and said to the Under-Secretary who received him :—"Sir, my name is Lorémont, I have an extensive record at the Prefecture of Police, and am told that by making myself useful in the cause of order, the authorities will treat me with indulgence. I have come to inform you that the chief of the barricade in the Rue Aumaire, a red radical, a socialist, lives in my house, where he lies concealed by his wife, his name is Brucker, and he belongs to a secret society ; 'The Soldiers of Despair.' He is the first one I deliver up to you, but if you are indulgent towards me, I can find others." The Secretary smiled wickedly, and said in a delighted tone :—"Very good, you may reckon on us." The next day, at two o'clock in the morning, Brucker was arrested at his house, and shot the same evening. Two days after that, Mrs. Brucker was seen with Lorémont ; it was she who had given him the information which led to the arrest of her husband and his friends ! A few days later, a woman passing through the Saint-Martin market about ten in the evening, in a thick fog, cried out :—"Help ! Help !" She had just stumbled across the body of a man lying on the pavement ; and the neighbours came and picked up the man, who had been the victim of an attempted murder. After wiping away the blood running from an immense cut on his forehead, they put the light to his face, in order to ascertain who he was. Several of them went away with disgust, saying :—

"Bah ! it's only Lorémont, the informer."

Others, less severe, seeing that the unfortunate man was still living, took him home, where he was nursed by Madame Brucker. A fortnight after he was restored, he asked for the cross of the Legion of Honour, which was accorded to him, with the following note :—"Wounded whilst fighting for the cause of Order." Lorémont was a thief and a swindler, and was employed in watching those who were engaged in the same crimes as himself. We shall see later on in the story, why and how he was connected with the Police of the Empire. The portrait we have sketched of him is rather brief ; we will leave the individual himself to fully develop his character and show our readers what he really is.

It was just striking eleven when the baron entered the "Peau de Lapin," a strange tavern, built on the outskirts of Montparnasse, just where the quarries commence. After having given the portrait, we will now describe the frame. We said "tavern," because we did not dare to say "hovel." In a street which only existed in the minds of the vestrymen of the parish, a street without houses, surrounded by timber yards and waste lands, muddy and marshy, stood the immense door of an unpaved court-yard ; the right-hand side of which was occupied by the stables in which the dirty straw formed a thick carpet, whilst the further part served as a timber yard. On the left-hand side was a glazed shed, a strange, badly built place, without the slightest attempt at design or plan, appearing in the day time, to be a dirty workshop, and at night, an immense lantern. This shed was the tavern known as the "Peau de Lapin," and its customers liked it first for its unique position, and then for its excellent drinks. The principal advantage of the place was that whenever the police were in-

quisitive enough to come and visit the establishment, the timber yard was ready to receive in the shadow of its stacks of wood, those gentlemen who did not wish to meet the members of the force. Another advantage resulting from the exceptional position occupied by the tavern was that when after a lucrative "job," the fortunate "operators" had indulged in too much absinthe, cognac, etc., they could easily be got rid of by carrying them outside, in the summer, and in the winter, by putting them into the stable, on the smoking litter. What beautiful dreams the rascals indulged in, whilst lying on the clean and healthy wheat straw! They dreamed they were honest!

The shed, or rather the tavern had been built with the *débris* of houses that had been pulled down, and its front looked like the dress of some harlequin; where the windows had been broken by his bibulous customers the landlord had pasted over pieces of paper of various colours. The woodwork and the glazed work hardly met properly, the windows, doors, and glasswork all forming one indistinct mass, the spiders and multipedes, aided by the dust and steam, filling up the badly jointed places. The windows had no curtains, but they prevented the sun from coming in during the day, and people from looking in at night, so thick was the steam on these windows. It is about eleven o'clock in the evening when we introduce the reader. The door, when opened, threw out luminous rays and a nauseous smell into the quagmire which the customers called the garden. The counter was on the right, one could only get to it by stepping over a black hole which led into the cellar. At night this hole was closed by a trap-door, but in the day-time it was left open and served to protect the hostess from the attentions of the gentlemen customers, and the till from those who might have wished to dip their hands into it.

Opposite the counter, that is to say, on the left, there were six tables with benches, three set up against a partition and three against the walls. The liqueur bottles, and what liqueurs! were, together with the bottles of fine wines, stacked up behind the counter, in such a way that not one of them was within reach of the customers of this elegant establishment. The waiter himself was a curious character; he was about thirty, inclined to be fat, and close-shaven like a priest; he was dressed in the colours of the house, that is to say, in a patched and dirty costume; his face emerged from his dirty collar, so clean, shining, and pomaded that it looked like a wax figure. It was of him that one of the wits of the "Lapin" said one day:—"What a lot of dirty linen he must have, to be able to change every day like that!" His face was round and he had a quiet look, and his cheeks were made up with red and white in a manner worthy of one of those bewitching beauties who adorn Leicester Square and the neighbouring streets. He was able to give information about Poissy prison, where he had spent five years, for some cause which he never revealed; he gave himself out as an honest man, and the hostess of the "Peau de Lapin" had the greatest confidence in him. This latter individual had nothing remarkable about her, except that the clients sometimes mistook her for a man, she having nothing about her to indicate her sex but her costume. In fact, one had to be accustomed to the place to distinguish anything in it, so dense was the atmosphere from the steam from the lamps and the smoke from the pipes.

When the baron arrived, the six tables were occupied; one at the further end, being taken up by Grosbouleau, Petite, Lalongueur, Nitard, and Lichet. The latter was playing cards with Grosbouleau, Petite leaning

lovingly over the latter's shoulder, was looking at his cards, whilst Nitard and Lalongueur were looking on and talking. Another table, close to the wall, was occupied by an old man, who was quietly smoking his pipe, and sipping a glass of wine. When he came in, every one had bowed, but not one of them had dared to sit down beside him, seemingly out of respect for the old man. The counter was invaded by half a dozen individuals who were drinking standing up, and there was a frightful noise going on in the place. The baron went in and took a seat at the table occupied by the solitary old man, who shook hands with him and asked :—

"Well, is there anything fresh?"

"Yes, I've a splendid job on."

"A splendid job," repeated the latter, then, in a louder tone so as to make himself heard by all, he added, "Let's talk it over then."

At this, silence was restored in the place, or rather, partially restored, for the others did not stop their conversation, but merely pitched it in a lower key. Lalongueur bent over to Petite and whispered :—

"And what about our affair?"

The girl then whispered to Grosboubleau :—

"And what about our affair?"

"Afterwards, afterwards," responded the latter, "let the baron finish first."

Petite bent over to Lalongueur and whispered :—

"Eugène says 'afterwards,' we must let the baron finish first."

"Very good," said Lalongueur, filling everyone's glass and drinking with them.

IV.

THE baron sat down opposite the old man and said :—

"Père Lanout, I have a lot of things to-day, rich goods, linen, and bronzes, everything must be taken away before to-morrow morn'g."

"Is it far?"

"You know where it is, at the shop at Asnières."

"Yes, it's a long way."

"There's another portion at Suresnes."

"There were two jobs then?"

"No, only they did not deliver them all at the same place."

"Very good, I'll do the needful."

Père Lanout was a receiver of stolen goods, but kept up with his clients or confederates all the appearances of an ordinary tradesman, feigning to ignore where the goods he bought came from. He did business with the baron and pretended that he supposed this amiable nobleman bought up the goods in the country and sold them to him in Paris. The two men knew each other thoroughly, and were well aware they could not dupe one another. They pretended a certain ignorance so as to be able to treat each other with politeness. There was a silence during which the baron drew a cigar from his pocket and lighted it, then, leaning his arms on the table, he said :—

"Père Lanout, will you take a drink with me?"

"Oh! no, thanks, I am late now, and must be going."

"Not yet, I want to speak to you. Waiter!"

The waiter ran up, and asked the baron what he wanted.

"Give us a bottle of Bordeaux."

"Very good, I know, the same as usual."

Gustave went up to the barmaid, spoke a few words to her, she at once went down into the cellar, returning with a bottle of old wine, which she handed to the waiter. Lalongueur whispered to Petite :—

"Goodness ! they're going in for Bordeaux ! It's we who will have to pay for that ! it's our poor money that's going to be melted."

Petite repeated this remark to Grosboubleau, who replied :—

"Yes, but from this evening, the baron will have to pay for his own wine."

Petite turned towards Lalongueur and said :—

"Eugène says the baron will soon be spending his own money."

Lalongueur ground his teeth but said nothing. Gustave the waiter having uncorked the bottle, and received the money, went away, and the baron, having filled the glasses, said to his companion :—

"Père Lanout, you know most of the commission agents in Paris, I think ?"

"Rather, I was one myself once ; but that depends upon the article !"

"The deuce ! But I don't know the article !"

"Well, speak plainly, what do you want ?"

"Oh ! a little information, about a firm with which I may have to do business, I should like to know whether they are solvent."

"What firm ?"

"Bérard and Co."

"Rue d'Enghien ?"

"Yes, that's it !"

Père Lanout gazed intently at the baron, and said to him with the astonished air of a man who cannot believe his own ears :—

"What ! you are going to do business with Bérard and Co., you !"

"Yes," said the baron, with effrontery, as if regardless of public opinion.

"What sort of business can you be doing with such a respectable house ?" asked the old man.

"What do you mean ?" asked the baron insolently.

"Oh ! I mean nothing personal," said Lanout, "I merely pointed out a simple fact."

The baron filled his glass, drank it off, and resumed :—

"Well, Père Lanout, that fact is precisely what astonishes me."

"How is that ?"

"I am astonished to see with what facility you grant a patent of honesty to a house so recently founded."

"What do you mean ?" said the old man, "this house was founded more than thirty years ago by Nither and Co. ; four years ago Nither retired from business, and left the business to his manager, Bérard ; the latter bought himself out in three years, and is now the sole proprietor of one of the first houses in Paris, for the word 'Company' means Madame Bérard."

"But by what means has Mr. Bérard attained such a position ?"

"By hard work," responded the receiver of stolen goods. For though he was an arrant knave, he was annoyed to hear this Lorémont, who was a greater knave than himself, blackening Bérard's character, which the latter had acquired simply by doing what Lorémont had never had the courage to do, that is to say, by honest work. There was a silence, which the baron broke by asking :

"And is he very rich?"

"Yes, immensely rich."

"Ah!" said Lorémont, whose lips quivered and eyes sparkled, in spite of himself. "But," continued he, "what I can't understand is the rapidity with which he has made his fortune. What was this Bérard ten years ago? Nothing."

"He came up from the provinces, about seven years ago, recommended to M. Nither by a painter. He comes from—"

"Oh! I know where he comes from," said the baron with a malicious smile.

"Well, I don't; however, his attention to his work, his reserved attitude, his aversion for pleasure, society, and, in fact, everything except his work, procured him the friendship of M. Nither, an original character, what they called a communist in '48; this M. Nither left him his business about four years ago."

"But he had married well, hadn't he?"

"Not at all, it's incredible, for M. Nither was to consult him; he had married six years ago, the daughter of some very poor stationer, who lived in the same house as he did in the Rue des Acacias, Monmartre; he loved her, he said!"

"And the girl's parents were very poor!" exclaimed the baron, astounded.

"As poor as Job! but he soon rescued them from poverty, and gave them a pension, I believe; but in spite of that they do not visit one another; he had his brother-in-law, young Mousson, in his office, but was obliged to send him away."

"That young Mousson, the one who is so fond of boating?"

"Yes, that's his brother-in-law, he played the very deuce at Bérard's."

"And notwithstanding all these burdens, he has made a fortune in this short time!"

"I don't say he has made it, but he is making it; he has repaid the money he borrowed, and the business now belongs to him."

"But he can't have earned a fortune in four years."

"Excuse me; he speculated on 'Change in 1866, during the war, and became rich in a few days."

"Ah! that accounts for it; and so he is now a rich man!"

There was again a silence, at the expiration of which Père Lanout hearing the clock chime half past eleven, got up, saying:

"I must go, Némie would be anxious; you can come to my house to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, everything will be counted."

"Just give me a little money this evening."

"There you are," said Père Lanout, slipping ten napoleons into his hand. "Good-bye."

"Till to-morrow."

Père Lanout having gone out, the baron made his way to the table occupied by his associates; pretending to be leaning on the table and carelessly talking, he said:

"Under my hand you'll find twenty francs for each of you, to-morrow evening at this time you will have the bill, the things won't be counted till then. What part of Suresnes were the things taken to?"

"We will take them to the shop at Asnières to-night," replied Grosbouléau.

"Very good, till to-morrow," said the baron, going out of the tavern. Lalongueur clapped Petite on the knee, and she did the same to Grosbouléau.

leau, repeating to the latter what his chum had said, viz., "Good-bye, may we never have the pleasure of seeing you again."

"My children," said Grosbouléau, "here are your twenty francs, we must now leave you, as Petite, Lalongueur, and myself are invited out to a family party. They are waiting for us; as I won the game, you pay for the drinks. Goodbye."

They shook hands, and the three inseparables went out. When they got outside, Lalongueur said:

"We must go and see that old rascal, Lanout, to-night."

"We'll cut across the waste grounds and catch him before he gets home," said Grosbouléau.

"Let's hurry up then."

Petite and the two men then left the roadway and cut across the waste grounds, and on arriving at the end of the Rue des Dames, caught up with Père Lanout. On seeing the three individuals running after him, he jumped forward, and rummaged in his pockets. A second afterwards the click of a revolver was heard. Lalongueur, who was very quick at hearing, immediately stopped his friends, and shouted:

"We are friends, Père Lanout, no joking, eh! It's Lalongueur and Grosbouléau come to talk to you on business."

"Speak from a distance, then, or come to my house to-morrow, in the daytime."

"But, Monsieur Lanout," cried Grosbouléau, advancing his head without moving his body, "that's exactly what we wanted to say. We are working on our own account now."

"Grosbouléau, Lalongueur, and Co.," said Lanout, laughing, suddenly remembering his conversation with the baron.

"Just so, and we have some choice lots of bronzes and linen to offer you."

"Well, come to-morrow, then."

"I should like to say a word to you privately," persisted Grosbouléau.

"Well, come forward alone, and look sharp," said the old man, taking out his loaded revolver. This limited confidence did not intimidate Grosbouléau, who came up and whispered:

"Leave your yard-gate open to-night, we shall come with the cart very early in the morning."

"Very good, it's understood."

"Good-night, Monsieur Lanout," said the three companions, one after the other.

"Good-night, my children," said the old man, hurrying off home, whilst the silhouettes of the three burglars disappeared in the gloom.

V.

ON leaving the tavern, the baron went home and changed his clothes: dressed in the latest fashion, thoroughly transformed in fact, he took a cab, gave the driver the address, and throwing himself back on the cushions, with one hand in the arm-rest, and holding in the other a cigar, he fell into a fit of meditation. The reader must be made thoroughly acquainted with the singular scoundrel we have presented to him, we will, therefore, as it were, lift the lid off his brain-box, and show him the strange mixture that was seething in the baron's brain. He was thinking to himself: "To-morrow, I commence the game, it will be either the galleys or a fortune!

I am a knave, a swindler, and the rest, but why is it? Poverty is the cause, as it is in so many other cases! Fools submit to it, but I am a sharp fellow, and use my good qualities for my evil deeds, because if I used them to do good I should die of hunger. I am a disreputable fellow, but what matters? Do I move in good society? do I live with swell people? no, I live on them; I attack them, let them defend themselves. Life is a battle, and the battle is to the strong; a strong man should pass amidst suffering without the slightest pang, and walk through any mire without feeling disgusted. He must seek his pleasures amongst horrors, and look for riches on the dunghill. Infamy and shame are only conventional terms; the real thing is to exist, what matters the means, to live is to enjoy, and I want to live. The code is the Testament, and we must be adroit, and slip round it, without being caught. Oh! I know very well people will cry out! But calumny has not lungs strong enough to attain me, besides it is so easy to be deaf, and not so commonplace as it may be supposed to revel in other people's scorn."

Making a cloud of smoke with his cigar, he continued:—"I am still strong, but I am getting old and must make haste, the time is coming when I shall no longer be able to silence with a blow any inquisitive enquirer; I must close my career and close it successfully. The burglars hardly pay expenses, and expose me to great dangers; whilst, as for gaining, it's impossible, people watch my cards. On the other hand, this affair is really good business, an inexhaustible source of riches. Linotte shall and must decide to do it." And the baron brought down his fist on the cushion in a manner which expressed the extreme measures he was prepared to take to make his accomplice obey him. "But," continued he, "Linotte is still very pretty, having her in my power, I also have the man, she is the living proof, and is acquainted with his past life. Bah! at a certain age men see less; living at a distance—the provinces—and a fortune! what a veil thrown over this past! it's by her I shall be able to keep my hold on him all his life. When she becomes troublesome, I shall cut right into this past, men and things. I ought to have gone sooner to Madame Equermoise; and should then have been able to talk to young Mousson; I must ascertain from him what his brother-in-law is worth. There lies my fortune, it would be stupid to ask for a lump sum, I must become a partner in the house. It's a real gold mine!" Then smiling to himself he continued, "Consideration, an entry into society, I shall be a respectable citizen, and it will be the first time those people will have had a man of intelligence in their gang. If I succeed, I shall get in well with the police, by telling them all I know; that will be a good method of getting rid of those who stand in my way. I shall deserve their protection, for I shall serve them daily by telling them what is said by those people who talk politics in backshops, and who hide in their hats their motto 'Public Order' or sing M. Casimir Delavigne's 'Parisienne' after dinner."

The cab stopped, the driver opened the door and said:—"Here we are, citizen." The baron's eyes sparkled with a savage light, he thought for a moment that the cabman had heard his soliloquy. Immediately recovering himself, he paid his fare, and ascended the two stories leading to Lelia d'Equermoise's apartments. He rang, and a woman looking about forty years old opened the door.

"Ah!" said she, with the familiarity of a "slavey" accustomed to serving a certain class of people, "it's a good thing you have come, they have been asking for you for the last two hours and the supper is over."

"There has been a supper this evening?" asked the baron, handing her his overcoat and hat.

"Yes, there are some fresh ones."

"Fresh people, are they swells?"

"Oh! yes, you'll see for yourself. They are in a fine state!"

"Already?"

"You'll see, they're as tight as lords."

"Who's there, Baptistine?" asked a rather hoarse voice.

"Monsieur de Lormond," replied the woman.

"Ah! the baron!" replied the voice, then it could be heard repeating in another direction; "It's the baron!"

Immediately a formidable chorus responded by singing:—"Tis the baron come to see us!" as that distinguished nobleman walked into the room. Lelia was at the dining-room door, she shook hands with him, and said in a half whisper:—

"We had given up all hope of seeing you, and we have company this evening, let me introduce you; silence, you noisy people. Gentlemen, allow me to introduce—" But the most discordant cries were heard:

"That'll do, we know him."

"I saw him at the Exhibition."

"He's been in Parliament."

"I've seen him at Fontainebleau—second series."

"Gentlemen, listen to me."

"How can you expect us to listen to you, Lelia, we've nothing to drink."

"Baptistine, some champagne."

"We've had enough champagne, give us some punch!"

"Gentlemen, I—"

"Come, Lelia, this borders on madness, you must really go to a doctor," exclaimed a masher of about nineteen, known as the Little Viscount, "you want to introduce Lormond to us, why, you might just as well introduce the Column Vendôme to us."

"But it isn't for you, it's for the count."

"For that?" said the Little Viscount, pointing to an inert mass, lying half on the sofa, half on the floor, his head crowned with the shell of a large lobster. "That's my property; you are forbidden to throw anything at, or introduce any one to, the animal without my express permission; it was I who brought him, and you have no right to place your friends around him; he's my friend. Fire away, introduce your friend, I represent the count."

Lelia, obeying, came forward, leading the baron by the hand, and said:—

"Monsieur the Count, allow me to introduce you to Monsieur the Baron de Lormond, one of our best friends."

"My dear baron," replied the Little Viscount, "as I am as tight as my friend, to use Baptistine's eloquent, elegant expression, I will not attempt to pick him up. Here, my noble friend, this drunken article you see lying on the floor, that sallow face, with green forehead, blackened eyes, violet and foaming mouth, and sandy moustache (dark this evening because it is wet), this image, my dear baron, represents my best friend, a descendant of the Lords of Chalus de Verlaine; his ancestor fought at the side of King Philippe the sixth at the battle of Cassel, and received a sword thrust on the forehead which was intended for the king; his forehead was so strong, that the Flemish sword broke in pieces; and it was by Philip's orders that, in memory of this great day, he adopted the motto, 'Soft heart, hard

head.' His ancestors stood seven feet in their boots, the kings called them their grand gentlemen. Baron, the little man I am now introducing to you is the last of this family of giants, his father was not made a Senator because he married his housekeeper, and became the happy father of my friend the Count de Mont-Perret; you have now made his acquaintance, I am thirsty, I do not ask you to sit down with my friend, sit down at the table, and let us drink."

"The punch!" cried one of the ladies.

"Take away the candles then," said the Little Viscount, seizing the spoon to stir up the punch which the servants placed on the table. The woman put out the candles, and the room was lighted up by nothing but the greenish light emanating from the flaming alcohol. Whilst the rest were engaged in singing, the baron whispered to Lelia:—

"Who are these people?"

"Don't you know them?"

"I know three of them—and the women?"

"I will introduce them to you—you'll see what you can do with them to-night."

"I am all attention."

"The idiot you see on the floor," commenced Lelia, "the Count de Mont-Perret, was brought here this evening by young D'Aumard, and is a real gold mine for us, he has just come into his fortune—It's Adèle Gallois who is piloting him. The other is called Biscaro, a Corsican, the son of a very rich man who is something at the Tuileries; he is as stupid as a donkey, for the last hour he has been making us smell a handkerchief belonging to the empress which he picked up on a chair at Saint-Cloud—"

"Ah! that's where he learns to steal handkerchiefs!"

"You know the others; I don't know the date of the month, but all these people have their pockets full of money. If you like to take the trouble we can do a good night's work to-night."

"Good business?"

"Yes, only two or three people, the usual lot."

"Is young Mousson coming?"

"Anna never misses a night, and you know very well she would not come without her Adolphe, the journalist."

"Speak louder!" cried the Viscount d'Aumard, "we can't hear you."

"That's just what we want."

"You must be two ninnies, then; private conversation is not allowed here; if you are stupid, hold your tongues, and listen to the others; if you are witty, speak out louder, so that we may all hear."

"I hope you don't think your conversation is very amusing!" said Lelia.

"Sometimes it is; it depends on the day."

"Well, we will come another time, let's know when you are in form!"

"In the first place we have drunk enough, my noble friend Mont-Perret is a proof of that. I should like a little fresh air; the ladies' perfumery has made my head ache; my mouth is sweetened by the punch, and I should like to have a smoke; I feel a longing to handle gold, and shuffle cards. Let's have a game of lansquenet, gentlemen."

"What! already?" said Adèle Gallois, "are you tired of our company?"

"Tired, no, but I can't say we are enjoying it either."

"You are not very polite before the ladies."

"I don't see any ladies!"

"You are becoming impertinent, in your endeavour to be witty."

"Wit! who's got any, I'll buy it up, ready money."

"That would be the first time you ever paid for anything."

"Count de Mont-Perret," cried the viscount, "do you hear how she is treating us?"

The intoxicated nobleman making no reply, his friend tapped him on the forehead, and said, "Is there no one at home? Every one has gone out. Come, old man, will you have a little alkali? We are going to play cards!"

At the words "play cards," which the viscount shouted in his ear, Mont-Perret moved his head, his dazed eyes sparkled for a moment, and he stammered: "I'll lay twenty-five napoleons."

"What! he wants to play! Baptistine, some tea for his highness. Bring in a flagon of the magic liquor!"

Baptistine brought in a glass of water, into which they poured a few drops of alkali. Whilst they were trying to induce the last of the Verlaines to drink this beverage, the company began to sing again, making a terribly discordant noise, in which could be heard imitations of the cries of all the animals in creation. Lelia at length stopped them, and intimated that it was now time to adjourn to the drawing-room. They at once filed off, and young D'Aumard was about to drag his friend with him, but Baptistine having assured him that in ten minutes' time he would be all right, he left him, and rejoined the others in the drawing-room.

VI.

BUT what a singular drawing-room! The walls were hung with a faded green paper, which had been stained and unglued by the damp, the gold mouldings were worn away, and displayed the red coating over which the gold had been placed; the door curtains had become yellow from long service, those at the windows, in green rep, worn out, ragged and dirty, served to wipe up the damp that fell on the woodwork: the carpet was worn out, thread-bare, and covered with dirty spots, and the furniture, old fashioned, rickety, and dirty, was worthy of the room it was placed in. There was only one new piece of furniture in the room, and that was a walnut table, covered with a green cloth. On this table, between two gilded candelabras, was a pile of cards, still packed in the official paper, real cards, those which inspire confidence. The girandoles hung awry across the looking-glass, which had become stained in places from the damp. On going into the drawing-room, one could not help shivering, so sharply did the cold strike in this damp room. The guests crowded round the table, the young viscount took the cards, and the game commenced.

"You are not going to play then?" asked Lelia of the baron, in a whisper.

"When the other man recovers," said the baron, in the same low tone, "you must have the cards changed, and put on the table those I gave Baptistine just now."

"Very good, I'll go and tell her."

"As soon as young Mousson comes, I want to speak to him, and I shall not commence play until then."

"Very good," said Lelia, going out to speak to Baptistine, who was helping the Count de Mont-Perret into the drawing-room.

Half an hour afterwards, Anna d'Avennes came into the room on the arm of her friend Adolphe Fontaine, surnamed Young Mousson. Anna d'Avennes gave herself out as being the widow of a Belgian officer; she was a fair woman, her mouth was too small, her lips too thick, and her teeth long and yellow; her nose was delicate, but the nostrils were too open, her eyelashes and eyebrows were very dark and thick, but Nature had nothing to do with that, her skin was unusually pale and without transparency, her eyes were superb, of a beautiful blue, and her ardent look occasionally betrayed signs of hysteria. Of middle height, she was thin, frail, and delicate; admirably dressed, she looked from a distance not over twenty, but a closer inspection revealed the fact that she must be between thirty-eight and forty. She worshipped her Adolphe, a young masher of nineteen, short and thin, dressed in the latest fashion. He had a long and thin nose, his mouth was large, and he had already lost most of his teeth; his upper lip was adorned with a moustache only visible through a magnifying glass, and he was constantly trying to twirl this precious excrescence; his eyes were black, and had an insolent expression, the right eye at least, for the other had a sty in it, and in order to hide this he constantly wore an eye-glass; it was even said he slept in it. After having tried all sorts of professions without settling down to any, he had gone into his brother-in-law's office, but had been sent away from there, for reasons which were never made known. When any one asked Adolphe what were his means of existence, he replied:

"I am a journalist, but don't sign anything, on account of my family—I am a reporter."

It was he who asked the artist Benassit:

"I say, you, who speak English as well as French, how do they pronounce the word 'reporter' over there?"

"Reporter," said Benassit, drily, "they pronounce it 'spy'!"

When Adolphe came in, he led Anna to the gaming-table, having received a glance from her which he had rightly interpreted, and came up to the baron, who said to him:

"Fontaine, can you spare me ten minutes?"

"Certainly, dear boy, twenty if you like, I'm at your service, but first let me go and shake hands with our friends."

Adolphe had a mania for calling people "dear boy" and shaking hands with everyone he met, a thing which was not a great honour to some of them.

"Now," said he, a few minutes later, "I am all attention."

The baron took him to the further end of the drawing-room, sat down with him on a sofa, and said:

"My dear Adolphe, a very important Dutch firm, with which I am connected, is about to enter into relations with a Paris firm, which you know well. I want a little information—confidential information—and ask you as a friend—"

"Friends like ourselves, dear boy," said Adolphe; "why, I'll give you any information I can."

"I am referring to the firm of Bérard and Co."

"My brother-in-law!" exclaimed the masher.

"Yes."

"Oh! let us not talk about him! a knave, a brute, an upstart!"

"I am aware of all that, I don't want you to introduce me to him in order to enjoy his friendship. I merely want certain information about him."

"It's true ! whether he's all right, solvent ? Yes, he's Al, everything that is written and signed is all right, but as for the man, he is a hard-hearted wretch, and wouldn't lend me five francs if I were dying for it."

"That shows he's a sharp man !" murmured the baron, forgetting himself.

"What a clever remark !" said Adolphe, rather annoyed.

"What I want to know is, what credit this firm may safely give him."

"Any amount."

"Tell me within a little."

"Well ! the firm has a working capital of two millions."

"Two millions ! two millions !" exclaimed the baron, his eyes sparkling with joy.

"He has a sleeping partner, but the greater part of the capital belongs to Bérard."

"But he has only been established five years."

"Yes, dear boy, yes, you are like us, you are asking yourself what means he can have employed ; five years ago he hadn't a penny. He will never make us believe he has attained to his present position in such a short time by fair means."

"And with his burdens," murmured the baron to himself.

"Burdens ! ah yes, and what burdens ! he publishes that everywhere ; for a few debts paid for us, and schooling for me, a fine thing !"

"Was he forced to do it ? If he did it of his own free will—"

"Certainly he did."

"And you are certain of the figures you quote ?"

"Of course I am, I was in the cashier's office at stocktaking."

"It's an estimate he made himself of his property and goods."

"Not at all, dear boy, the whole amount is in cash and scrip, and the latter is all 'to bearer,' it all belongs to him."

"I must see him ; what time is he there ?"

"You want to see him?—not a word to him about me—you don't know me."

"That's understood."

"He is at home every morning, but in the afternoon he is only there every two days, the days when my sister goes to see her mother."

"So he's alone those days ?"

"Yes, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays."

"I will call on him one of those days—I am not in a hurry—so long as the firm is all right !"

"Above all, not a word about me."

"You can rely on me," replied the baron, lighting a cigar.

"I say, who are those people ? They are playing a very warm game this evening."

"Oh ! they're very nice people, young D'Aumard brought them here."

At that moment the Little Viscount, who held the card, cried out :

"Five hundred and twelve louis !"

"Banco !" responded the Count de Mont-Perret, who had now recovered, with the exception of still feeling rather giddy and having a frightful headache.

"Five hundred ! by jove ! they are really playing to-night !" said Young Mousson.

"Yes. I'm going to have a look at them !"

"I say, old man, lend me a hundred francs till to-morrow, I've given all I had to Anna, and I want to play."

The baron made a grimace, but gave the money, then, getting up, he went towards the gaming table, the viscount had won, and was crying out, joyfully : " That's enough for this evening, I throw up the cards." The Count de Mont-Perret did not move a muscle, but remained absolutely calm, struggling against sleep and his headache. Plunging his hand into his capacious pocket-book he drew out two thousand franc notes. The women gazed with covetous eyes at the bundle of banknotes in the pocket-book. Lelia glanced at the baron, then at the count :

" Those cards are very dirty. Give us another pack, Baptistine," cried the baron.

Baptistine brought the set of cards, took two packs from underneath, shuffled them and gave them to Lelia to cut.

" I go five napoleons," said the baron, dealing the cards.

The count threw a bundle of notes on the table. The baron won seven consecutive games. The journalist Adolphe Fontaine then took the cards, saying :

" You are showing off, dear boys. I go five francs ! "

This threw a damper on the proceedings, and the baron took advantage of this interval to go out, slipping into Lelia's hand two thousand eight hundred francs.

" Good business this evening," said she.

" The last are the best."

" What do you mean ? "

" Nothing ! "

On going downstairs he said to himself :

" I have finished my day's work, and can now go to bed. It promises well. I have won. To-morrow—a million ! Ah ! suppose I should win a fortune ! "

VII.

THE next morning about nine o'clock, Grosbouleau and Lalongueur arrived at Père Lanout's house, in Montparnasse. The latter was waiting for them in a small office at the back of his shop ; an old curiosity shop that it would be very difficult to describe, so various were the articles heaped up in it. The two burglars took their hats off before Père Lanout, and stood there, hat in hand, looking very timid and embarrassed. The old man said :

" I was waiting for you. I have received your consignment. What do you want to do with those things ? "

" How ! do with them ? " exclaimed Grosbouleau, looking first at Lanout and then at Lalongueur. " You know very well what we want. We wish to sell them."

" We wish to sell them," chimed in Monsieur Lalongueur.

" You wish to sell them to me, but do they belong to you ? Where did you get them ? "

" What ! "

This time the two burglars looked at each other, as if to ask themselves whether the man who was talking to them was in his right senses. At last Grosbouleau replied :

" Yes, sir, they belong to us, they don't belong to the baron ; he has his share. You will buy that from him ; and we want to sell you our portion."

"I buy from the baron because I know him. I buy up goods that he has bought or exchanged in the provinces, as my books will prove."

They again gazed at each other, Grosbouléau at Lalongueur, and Lalongueur at Grosbouléau, and their eyes seemed to say: "But the man is mad! He is perfectly well aware the baron was the director of their gang, or the baron must have been having a joke at the old man's expense." Grosbouléau was at first surprised, then felt uneasy, and at last burst out laughing! Lalongueur, who was watching every change on Grosbouléau's expressive features, and who reproduced them on his own, out of pure sympathy, burst out laughing at the same time as his friend, and there they stood before the unmoved Père Lanout, literally splitting their sides with laughter. When they had calmed down somewhat, Père Lanout resumed:

"In a word, this is how the matter stands; I can only buy from a properly established firm, having a proper title, and a fixed office. Do you understand?"

Grosbouléau meditated for a few seconds, Lalongueur scratched his head, as if he were making an outlet for the idea he was seeking for. All at once Grosbouléau struck his forehead, and cried out very much in the way Archimedes had once cried out, "*Eureka*":

"I understand. Ah! you are a sharp fellow, Père Lanout! The 'coppers' might come here, but would find nothing wrong. You would show your books! I twig!"

Père Lanout did not move a muscle, not saying either "yes" or "no." Grosbouléau placed two chairs together, made a sign to Lalongueur to sit down, and sat down himself; then, raising his voice, he commenced:

"Monsieur Lanout, my friend and I, the two representatives of the firm of Grosbouléau, Lalongueur, and Co., Rue Pelée, Paris, offer you certain goods, bought during a tour we make every week in the environs of Paris."

Lalongueur was struck dumb with astonishment and admiration; with his mouth wide open, he gazed first at Lanout and then at his partner, trying to understand what all this meant.

"Very good," replied Lanout, opening his book, in which the goods received during the night were already entered, "you succeed Lormond."

"But not at all."

"Never!" added Lalongueur.

"We are founding a business, we are the late employés of the firm of Lormond and Co."

"And you take away their customers," said the old man, smiling.

"Just so, we take away their customers," repeated Grosbouléau, grinning.

Lalongueur again burst out laughing, wriggling about so much that he broke his chair. At a sign from his partner he at once calmed down again.

"Monsieur Lanout," continued Grosbouléau, "treat us well, and we shall do a good deal of profitable business together. You know what good articles are. We are three altogether."

"Three! ah! yes, Company."

"That means Petite, a little girl who knows what good linen is, I can assure you; when she chooses anything, you may be sure it is first class. Lalongueur has been a cabinet-maker and knows the difference between good and shoddy furniture; we only take—I mean we only buy the very best of everything. I have been a bronze-worker and no one can deceive me about such articles, I can tell you."

"You will certainly be able to do a good business like that. Here is what I propose for what you have already brought."

"How much?" asked the two burglars, getting nearer to him.

"Five hundred francs."

"Five hundred!" exclaimed Lalongueur and Grosbouleau, simultaneously.

"Doesn't that suit you?"

"Certainly! certainly!"

While Lanout was writing, Grosbouleau whispered to his chum:

"You see if we had remained with that thief of a baron, he would have given us about forty francs each."

"He's a brigand—such people ought to be punished. That's where the Police ought to turn their attention," replied Lalongueur.

Père Lanout counted out the money and said:

"Do you know what the baron is going to do at Monsieur Bérard's, Rue d'Enghien?"

"What?" asked both the burglars at the same time, whilst Grosbouleau, who appeared very uneasy, added:

"And is he really going there?"

"Yes, to-day, I believe."

"Ah!" said the two men, looking at each other.

"You'll say nothing to the baron about the business we are doing together."

"My business does not concern him, and once out of my house, I don't know you," said Lanout, handing over the money.

"Good-bye, Monsieur Lanout," said the two partners, taking their leave of the old man. As soon as they got into the street, the two men looked at each other, and Grosbouleau said:

"The baron is certainly a scoundrel."

"Yes, I'm of your opinion."

"He wants to betray us, but we won't give him the time."

"Let's go to breakfast," said Lalongueur, "Petite is waiting for us at Courbevoie."

"Poor little angel, let's get back as soon as we can, she is a good councillor."

The two partners then went off to the railway station, and arrived at Courbevoie about an hour later. Petite was waiting for them, as they were going to breakfast at a small tavern on the banks of the Seine. After the first mouthful, Grosbouleau said:

"My children, just listen to me, the baron is no fool, you know that as well as I do, you may feel sure that when he learns what we have done to-day, he will avenge himself. The steps he is taking prove to me that he is trying to 'have' us, and I am on my guard. If it isn't to avenge himself on us, it is to do something which interests us, since he is going to Bérard's, the owner of the house in which we 'operated' yesterday. You know the baron is not a very particular fellow."

"I know that," said Lalongueur.

"They say he has been a spy—a drunkard will always drink—and I am afraid something will happen. In any case, we must ascertain what he is going to do at Bérard's."

"You are quite right."

"How shall we manage that?" asked Petite.

"Why, you will have to work it."

"But how?"

Lalongueur craned forward to hear what his chum was about to say.

"You must take your servant's certificate, visit the green-grocers' shops in the Rue d'Enghien, get them to tell you about Bérard, and try to get a situation in his house, as housemaid, cook or scullery-maid. Have you understood?"

"Not quite."

"Have you?" said he, turning to Lalongueur.

"Oh! I have and I haven't; I understand what you say, but don't see what you are aiming at."

"And yet it's very simple. Petite must ascertain and tell us what the baron is doing in that house. If it's a scheme of vengeance, we will go into the country for a while. If it's to carry out some design that we don't know about, we will try to get our share of the profits. Now do you see?"

"Oh! yes, I understand now!"

"What a man!" exclaimed Lalongueur. "He's a genius!"

"When shall I go?" asked Petite.

"Presently, after breakfast, and the sooner the better— This evening you will find us at the Barrière de Clichy, at the creamery— We are going to spend the day, Lalongueur and I, in looking for lodgings outside Paris, so as to be ready for anything."

"That's a good idea."

They continued their breakfast, and when they had finished, started off to put their plan into execution. The next day Petite entered M. Bérard's house as housemaid.

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That evening, the baron, seated opposite Linotte in a room at Brébant's Restaurant, handed her a five hundred franc note, saying:

"Here's some money to buy the most necessary articles, be ready in two days' time, and we will then commence immediately. In a month's time, we shall be millionaires, Linotte!"

"That will seem a funny thing to me!"

"It is a very fine evening, Linotte; after dinner we will take a drive."

"Where to?"

"To the Bridge de l'Estacade."

"Why?" said Linotte, turning pale, "why do you want to take me there?"

"To inspire you with courage!"

PART II

THE FIRM OF BÉRARD AND CO.

I.

WE have been obliged to commence our story with the description of a strange lot of people. Our readers may have thought they were to be carried into a succession of gambling saloons and prisons, to arrive at last in the Assize Court. But such is not the case. This drama is the true story of an unfortunate man, and our readers will soon see that our object is to vindicate a social right. If we have wilfully obliged them to see cruel things, and if our phrases have been too crude, it is because we know of no other way of holding evil-doing up to scorn than by exposing it in all its naked deformity. This said in order to reassure those who may have been frightened by certain rather audacious incidents in the story, we will now continue. About a week after the events we have just related, two men were sitting on the banks of the river, in the Ile de la Grande-Jatte, at the same spot where the boat landed, the evening of the Asnières affair. The first of these two men looked about sixty, and the other about forty.

"So you have been completely plundered, and that by my fault," said the oldest of the two men.

"By your fault?"

"Yes, it was I who almost obliged you to buy this house on the island."

"Fortunately it doesn't matter much."

"You speak very lightly about it, Bérard."

"I regret but one thing, which is that my wife will not live here in future: her parents had already tormented her about it. I shall not come either, and it is the only spot where you visited us with any pleasure."

"With pleasure!"

"Anyhow you came. I never really understood this preference."

"And yet it is very simple. This spot makes me feel thirty years younger."

"Really."

"I have not always been the severe merchant you have always known me. I have led a Bohemian life—before I went into business I studied the Fine Arts—and boating."

"I can hardly realize such a thing."

"Yes," said the old man, with a mocking smile, "you young fellows, when you see a tanned face, you will never believe it has once been as handsome as your own."

"Oh!" protested Bérard.

"We are very comfortable here. Forced to wait for the boat to Asnières, where we shall dine and find your family—since the house having been

plundered you are forced to dine at an hotel—I will tell you of an adventure which happened to me at this very spot.”

The young man having announced that he was all attention his companion commenced :

“I used to go boating nearly every evening, going up from Asnières to Neuilly, past this island which was known at that time as the *Ile du Roi*. I had left Paris some time before in consequence of an unfortunate love affair, and had not long been back. One evening I was going down the river towards Asnières, it was about nine o'clock, and almost dark, when all at once someone hailed me from the island. I went to see who it was, and found a man and a young woman who asked me to take them over the river. I offered to take them to Asnières, and they accepted. I recognized the man, from having seen him in the *Quartier Latin*; he seemed astonished to meet me, and asked the reason of my disappearance.

“‘I will tell you all about it,’ said I; ‘that will enable me to vent my spite against the woman. But first get into the boat.’

“The young man invited his companion to enter the boat. She stepped in, and her slow and graceful movements seemed to go straight to my heart. Like a vague souvenir, she passed by me, and took her seat in the stern of the boat. I could not see her face which was hidden by a *Chantilly* veil, but I remarked, with surprise, that she did not take her eyes off me. I had been back in Paris about ten months, after an absence of three months. I had gone away with a smooth face, but had returned with a beard which rendered me quite unrecognizable. Giving a few strokes with my oars, we started off towards Asnières, and I commenced my story as follows :

“‘You asked me the reason of my disappearance, my dear fellow : I will now explain the affair to you. Four years ago I was studying with an artist, who has since attained celebrity. One day, I felt very idle, and was lying on my sofa smoking; after having read the news contained in the paper in which my tobacco was done up, I laid my head back on the cushions, when all at once, I perceived, at a neighbouring window, a beautiful fair girl, with alabaster neck, lips of—but no, I will not describe her, but merely say that she was the realist type of Eve, mingled with the ideal type of Venus. She did not see me, and my imagination was soon at work. I created a new world for myself with her, and soon began to wonder how I could turn my dream into a reality. I will spare you the details of our preliminary relations. Being under age we were unable to marry, but as we were determined to be united, she consented to become my mistress. A year passed in this way; ah! what a happy year!—in the course of which a son was born to us, but Heaven not consenting to leave us the child born of our unconsecrated union—he died.’

“I interrupted my painful narrative at this point, and noticed that the young woman was weeping. My vanity as a story-teller was greatly flattered by this sign of sensibility. As we were going down the river with the tide, I laid up my oars and continued :

“‘The death of our child was the commencement of our troubles. I had but little work; since I had made the young girl's acquaintance my people had neglected me. Totally destitute, poverty with its sad cortège of sufferings soon came and knocked at our door. My only consolation was the love of her who had been the unconscious cause of all my misfortunes. One evening that consolation was snatched from me; the young girl disappeared. On going home one night, I found the house empty. At first,

I felt no alarm, and waited patiently ; an hour passed—no one—midnight struck—no one ! I had fallen off to sleep ; when I woke up in the morning I was still alone. I went out, and scoured the neighbourhood, but could gather no news of my mistress. Harassed, I returned home, when my eyes fell on a letter which I had not noticed the previous evening. I opened it and read as follows : “ Jacques, since we have been together, you have endured much suffering ; for my sake you have given up all comforts, for my sake you have drawn down upon yourself the malediction of your parents ; these sacrifices are too great to allow me to accept them any longer. I leave you for ever, when I am gone you will be happy, and I shall not be pursued by the world’s scorn. Do not blame me, and, above all, do not doubt of my love for you, for what I am now doing is the best proof of my affection I have ever given you. Adieu ! ”

“ ‘ When I had read this hypocritical letter, I was completely crushed. Thus, I had sacrificed everything for this woman, and she expressed her gratitude—by marrying another man six months afterwards.’ At this point of my story, it seemed to me that the young woman was sobbing. I continued with a certain pleasure which I did not myself really understand at the moment.

“ ‘ Yes, the ungrateful, cursed woman, for whom I had sacrificed everything, went and married another man—and thus consummated her treachery by breaking the heart of the man whom she had so long martyred. “ Forget her ! ” said my friends. But, no, to forget would be almost to forgive her, and I will never do that. It was just as fine and calm as it is to-night. All at once the boat rocked, and a voice said :—“ My God ! Forgive him ! ” and we heard the fall of a body in the water. I raised my head, and found, to my great astonishment, that the young woman had disappeared. I pulled off my clothes, jumped into the water, but after three plunges came up empty-handed, the fourth time I contrived to bring her up with me. The young man tried in vain to restore her ; the moon shining with its effulgent light, lighted up the melancholy scene ; I went up and looked at the young woman.

“ ‘ Adèle ! ’ I exclaimed. ‘ Why it’s my late mistress, sir ! ’ and I tried to take her up in my arms.

“ ‘ Sir,’ said the young man, severely, repulsing me, ‘ it is my wife ! ’

“ ‘ And the mother of my child ! ’ I responded. But my strength was failing after my exertions, and I fainted away. When I recovered, I was lying about where we are now—and alone.” The old man said no more.

“ ‘ What a singular story you have related,’ said the man we have described as Bérard.

The old man took his companion by the hand, and said :—

“ Jacques, I have just told you the story of your mother’s death.”

“ ‘ What are you saying ? ’ ”

“ The truth.”

At that moment, a boat came up close to the two men, and the waterman said :—

“ Gentlemen, they are waiting for you.”

“ Come on, my friend,” said the old man, leading the young one into the boat, astounded by what he had just heard.

II.

THERE was a silence, only broken by the waterman's oars splashing heavily in the water ; Bérard and his friend were seated in the stern of the boat.

"But why did you wait till to-day to tell me this story, Monsieur Nither?" asked Bérard.

"That was the sole reason of my coming to Courbevoie. This month Bérard and Co's. business will belong entirely to you ; it was necessary to inform you why you had been able to attain such a position with such ease and rapidity."

"I always attributed it to your kindness."

"Listen to me, my dear Bérard. I am going to leave Paris, I will and must tell you everything—Adèle's death had terrible results for you, as I found out some time afterwards—you were hardly two years old. The revelation brought about by my unworthy conduct, led your father to doubt of his paternity, and he abandoned you, disappearing without leaving the slightest trace of his whereabouts. Brought up as a poor man's son, you were taken away from school and put to work at the age of ten ; abandoned to your own resources, living not with honest workmen having wives and families, but with the waifs and strays, you made most unfortunate acquaintances—your existence was ruined by this misfortune—"

Bérard buried his face in his hands, overcome by emotion.

"One day, I hardly know how, I heard that Adèle had left a son, who had been abandoned by his father—and that this son had gone astray—I cannot tell you how this news affected me—I blamed myself for everything that had happened, it was I who had revealed her past life to the husband, it was I who had been the cause of the poor woman's death, deprived the child of both his father and mother, and thus ruined him—I was so haunted by this idea that I could get no sleep, my business increased daily, everyone envied me, and thought me a fortunate man—but I was continually pursued by this souvenir and the remorse it caused me."

"Poor M. Nither !"

"Oh ! you need not pity me, on the contrary—being about to retire from business, I want to tell you everything, and then ask your forgiveness."

"My forgiveness !"

"Yes," continued M. Nither, "from that day forth, I had no rest, but busied myself with obtaining your pardon, your good conduct greatly helped me. Then not wishing to tell you anything, I got a friend to send you to me—you know the rest."

"You are very kind, M. Nither," said Bérard, full of gratitude, "what other man in the world would have thus atoned for an imaginary fault ; you have created me, and made me what I am—you have saved me, and it is thanks to you that I have become a man again."

"But it was I who ruined you !"

"Once again I thank you, sir !"

"Let us talk over business, before rejoining the ladies. I have put everything in order, and shall leave my own money invested in the business, consequently my departure will make no change in the firm. Continue as you are, even at the risk of being considered unsociable. Live at home with your family and children. The past is now effaced, article 47 by which you were still bound, has, by the aid of certain powerful and

discreet friends, been quite forgotten ; only you, I, and Heaven know about it. Stay at home, do not seek either luxury or display. You will then have nothing to fear, and you will have around you what I have never had ; people who love you."

"Oh ! what are you saying ?" exclaimed Bérard, taking his hand and shaking it affectionately.

The boat had now arrived opposite the Restaurant Laroche, and they could perceive the carriage which had brought Madame Bérard and the children.

"Come, my dear Jacques, we have arrived, let us say nothing about the past, and banish all care. It's I who invite you to this farewell dinner, and I am very grateful to the burglars who prevented you receiving me in your own house."

The two men then jumped out of the boat, two pretty children immediately ran to meet them, and presented their rosy cheeks to be kissed. Madame Bérard was looking on with beaming eyes, and smiling face.

"Have you been here long ?" asked Bérard.

"No, we have just arrived, I got your telegram whilst I was at father's, and we came straight here. So everything has been taken away ?"

"Yes, even my portrait and," added he, kissing his wife, "what proves that these people had no taste is that they have left yours."

"Come," said M. Nither, "let's begin our dinner," and he took the children to the little arbour where the table had been set out. The china and the crystal sparkled on the white table-cloth, and the rays of the lamp scintillated on the cut glass decanters.

"Are they all quite well at Batignolles ?" asked Bérard.

"Yes, yes !"

"Your father didn't complain about me ?"

"No, we spoke chiefly about Adolphe."

"Ah ! isn't he going on any better ?" said Bérard, knitting his brows.

"No, he has done other stupid things ; he has been gambling and lost money on parole."

"He's a troublesome boy !"

They took their places at table, and the dinner commenced very joyously. It was in fact a charming tableau, this family. Madame Bérard was about twenty-two, although a Parisienne, and dark, she had the delicately-chiselled nose, the thick lips and pure forehead of the southern women. Beneath the shadow of her long eye-lashes, her black eyes seemed to be wonderfully soft. Her downy cheeks were of that healthy, warm tint peculiar to creoles. When she smiled two dimples, veritable nests for kisses, formed a frame-work for her cherry lips and white sharp teeth. Splendidly made, her graceful contour being accentuated by her substantial build, everything in this woman seemed beautiful, good, and kind.

Jacques Bérard was a man of middle height, looked about forty, and was of a substantial build also. He had the calm and serene face of a man who had seen life in the cruel sense of the word, his nose was large, his eyes sparkling, his mouth was small but heavy, his complexion was somewhat pale, his hair fair, and he wore a sandy moustache. There was a deep wrinkle across his forehead, and one could see that some tenacious idea was in possession of his mind. The children were those eternal little cherubs with sparkling eyes, rosy cheeks and fair hair, little angels whose every cry is a song of joy. It was a merry dinner, a family fête, where they made plans for the future, and the husband and wife determined to

finish the work they had commenced, and to place their children in such a position that they would never know the poverty they, the parents, had known. They both felt that the position they had attained had been honestly acquired by hard work, that the man who had helped them had only recompensed their obstinate labours, and M. Nither was the first to admit this.

When Jacques entered the firm of Nither and Co. he was penniless. Up with the lark, hail, rain, blow, or snow, he was always first at the shop, often making his way there by the pale light of the waning moon, whilst the sharp morning wind cut through his thin garments. From morning to night he kept to his work, and braved every idea of fatigue. Though he returned home every night tired, exhausted and footsore, he never complained. His aim was to show himself grateful for the kindness they had displayed towards him. When he became rich, he was still the same, and really could not have stopped in his bed after six in the morning; as soon as he woke he was forced to get up, it was in vain he lay on his right side, on his left side, or that he closed his eyes, it was time to get up, and he had to rise and go to work, simply from force of habit.

When the dinner was over they went with M. Nither to the railway station, as he was going away the same evening. When Bérard got home, and the servants had put the children to bed, and Madame Bérard had gone to bed also, he went downstairs and walked up and down the shop. He was thinking of what had been said that evening, but it was in vain that he tried to remember what his mother was like. He had never known anyone around him; brought up in the workshop, he had learnt and submitted to what was said and thought in the place, there was in his career a crime which took its origin in the company he had been obliged to frequent, and the manners of those with whom he had been obliged to live. This crime, an eternal subject of remorse, pursued him incessantly; in his office during the day, in bed at night, whilst he was bending over his children's cradle; he could hear that terrible gurgling, and in the dark corners of the room, he could see the stiff and white outline of a hanging man! Walking up and down his deserted shop, he said to himself, "And must I have this picture continually before my eyes? Neither the joys of my family, which I adore, nor this comfort, nor this position will ever drive from my thoughts this odious souvenir. What a fearful punishment remorse is! What a strange existence mine has been! strange story! This woman—my mother. This man who was deceived, my father, who abandons me. Where is the good? Where is the evil? Who is to tell me, amongst the people with whom I am obliged to earn my living? Who will help me? No one. Society will treat me cruelly, and if I make a mistake, if I fall, society will be relentless. They have prevented nothing, and will forgive nothing. I cannot sleep at night, for the nightmare prevents me, and I am afraid I may talk in my sleep. Oh! the unfortunates! if they only knew, my wife, my children, I should certainly kill myself."

And he strode up and down, panting, shaking his head, as if to drive this haunting vision from his mind. All at once he thought he heard some one walking about, he listened, saying to himself, "What can that be?" Taking the lamp he went towards a staircase leading from the shop to his private office, which was the first floor. He opened the door quickly, and discovered a half-dressed woman.

"What are you doing there?" he asked.

"Sir," said Petite, for it was she, "I heard someone walking about

in the shop, and I came to see who it was ; if you had not spoken, I should have called for help, for I did not recognise you."

Bérard looked at her intently.

"Have you been there long?"

"I have just come down."

"But I don't know you, you must be the new maid?"

"Yes, sir, it's my turn to sleep in the pantry, so as to be near the children ; not being used to the house, and not knowing that you work at night, I came down."

"You did quite right ; go to bed again."

Petite obeyed, but on going upstairs she thought to herself : "I was wrong to let him catch me, I couldn't hear anything, but it's a funny thing to see a man get up in the middle of the night to talk to himself." Bérard said to himself : "This girl cannot have heard anything ! I will sit down at my desk for a moment, the light seen outside will lead people to suppose I am working." He was arranging the lamp on his desk when he saw a card with a corner turned lying on the blotting pad ; he took it up and read : "Jeanne de Sillac." "What's that?" said he, turning it over, when all at once he noticed a line written in pencil. He placed it near the lamp, read it, and turned pale ; his hand trembled, the card slipped from his fingers, and he fell, senseless, into his arm-chair.

III.

THE terrible words that Bérard had read were : "*Linotte will come to-morrow about two o'clock.*" This time it was quite true, the past was now springing up before him, society was about to ask him for an account of himself. He, the condemned criminal, had, by dint of hard work and great sacrifices, created a position for himself ! By what right ! Bérard buried his face in his hands, his brain was on fire, and he thought it would burst. Linotte was still alive and had found him out. He had totally forgotten this girl, and when he looked at her card again, wondered what was meant by *Jeanne de Sillac*. Had Linotte made a lucky marriage ? If such were the case, he had nothing to fear, on the contrary, and it might be that she was coming to implore him to be prudent as to the past. This procured him a moment's relief. Leaning his arms on the desk, his thoughts reverted to his early life, the terrible moment of the crime ! He shivered as if he felt the hand that was placed on his shoulder, on the Bridge de l'Estacade ; and this happened sixteen years ago ! He recalled to mind the immense room in the Dépôt of the Préfecture, the examination, and the obstinacy with which they tried to find some other motive for the crime than the one he gave. They refused to believe that such a crime had been committed for the sake of such a woman as Linotte. He himself could hardly believe it now, and his memory reproduced this woman as being one who loved him, but whom he did not love. And yet he was not drunk that evening, he was mad ! He remembered the narrow cell at Mazas, the incessant watching he had to submit to, and the lugubrious dull morning, when they put him into a cab and drove him to the Morgue. When he thought of that the perspiration ran down his forehead, and he could see, in a damp room, on a marble slab, the hideous and disfigured corpse of his victim ! Wishing to escape from this obsession, from this picture which horrified him, he got up, walked across the room and drank

a glass of water, then feeling calmer, he sat down again. On seeing Jeanne de Sillac's card on the table, with the remark, "*Linotte will come to-morrow at two o'clock*," his thoughts reverted to the same subject.

He was confessing near the corpse, before the investigating magistrate, he was on his knees, and imploring them to pardon him—and the dead body filled the atmosphere with an odour of slime which he thought he could smell even at that moment. He could see the narrow, dark room into which he was taken to be examined, he remembered his confession, his remorse—the astonishment of the magistrates on seeing the expression of shame, remorse, and repentance on his face, and the sympathy shown towards him by the barrister who had been appointed by the court to defend him. He remembered the nights of hallucination during which his victim came to lead him to the scaffold, his fear of this disgraceful death, his longing to commit suicide before the trial, and the hopes he entertained after each interview he had with his lawyer. Lastly he saw the immense Assize Court, the judges in their red robes, and gendarmes, the curious public gazing at him as if he were a wild beast; and the blood flowed to his face—He remembered the aspect of the court, dimly lighted with lamps, and saw himself standing at the bar, trembling with anxiety. The code was opened—they read certain passages, and he heard one of the judges say:—"Ten years penal servitude." His lawyer came up, shook hands with him, and congratulated him, saying:—"You are saved!" But he did not reply, for he knew in his own heart that far from being saved, he was ruined for life. He could see the galleys, and his companions, the harshness with which he was treated at first, then, how everything suddenly changed, and he was employed in the office. He then understood that M. Nither had discreetly come to his aid, and remembered distinctly the happy day when they called him into the governor's office, and said:—"You are pardoned and will be free to-morrow. Try and deserve the favourable way in which you have been treated." When he left the prison a stranger came and took him to a place a few miles from Paris, and, after explaining everything to him, brought him to the very house he was now living in.

Oppressed, and almost suffocated, fatigued by the tension to which his brain had been so long exposed, Bérard fell into his arm-chair thoroughly exhausted. A few minutes afterwards, he jumped up, understanding that he was attacked, and that he must defend himself, but finding that he could hardly breathe in the house, he went out and walked straight before him for an hour. He soon found himself on the banks of the Seine, at Saint-Denis, and now breathed with greater freedom. Avoiding the village, he followed the pathway running along the side of the fields. The fresh wind laden with the odours of new mown hay, caressed his forehead, the night fog made him shiver, making his hair and beard damp; he at length crossed the ditch, and plunged into the long, sweet-smelling luzerne. Fatigued by this long walk, but feeling much calmer, he at once lay down on the grass, and with his chin in his hands, he tried to recollect. But it was in vain, surprised by the lovely scene he had before his eyes, he forgot everything.

It must be confessed that it was a pretty tableau. The fog had enveloped everything in its greyish mist—There was no longer a breath of wind in the invisible poplars, the willow-tree dipped its branches in the river without causing a ripple; silence reigned everywhere, hardly troubled by the distant rumbling of the canal lock. The whole country was asleep. But a thin blue line could already be seen on the horizon! and Life returned again, the birds commenced to sing, and the cocks to crow, the carts rumbled

along the road, the shrill railway whistle rent the air, and the bells could be heard ringing on the necks of the horses towing the barges along the canal. Gradually the trees emerged from the mist casting their long shadows in the grey dawn. The plain soon appeared with its upstanding corn, and its world of insects, finally the sky, the earth, the trees and the river all emerged from the fog, and the sun, piercing the horizon, sparkled on the waters and shone through the trees. Bérard got up, feeling much calmer, the coming day had driven his sombre thoughts from his mind. He suddenly remembered about the visit announced for that day, and determined to meet the attack by the force of inertia. He then returned home, and sat down at his desk ; when the messengers arrived, they thought he had been working there all night, and did not appear at all astonished. Just as he was going out of the office, he called one of the messengers and asked him in a careless tone :

"What card is that?"

"It was given to me yesterday."

"Who gave it you?"

"A lady, sir."

"Ah! what did she want?"

"She said it was for some private business."

"Is she coming again to-day?"

"Yes, sir, about one o'clock."

"I cannot possibly see her, as I have an important appointment."

"What shall I tell her?"

"Tell her to write to me."

"Very good, sir."

Bérard walked through the shops, saw the men were all at their posts, and then went to his private apartments, passing through his wife's bedroom. Near the bedside stood the cot in which the two children were peacefully sleeping; by the pale glimmer of the nightlight, he gazed on the charming group, composed of everything he loved best in the world. A tear fell on his cheek. "Poor things," he thought to himself, "if they only knew! But they shall never know, never!" He wiped his eyes, kissed his children, and was about to kiss his wife when she opened her eyes.

"What! you have just come upstairs!"

"Yes!"

"You have been working all night again!"

"No, I fell off to sleep."

"You are deceiving me—Oh! Jacques, I cannot allow you to kill yourself like this, suppose you should fall ill?"

"You are very foolish, my dear—Go to sleep again, I am very sorry I woke you up."

"No, you did quite right. I was dreaming such horrid things!"

"Horrid things!"

"Yes, about you."

"About me?" said Jacques, turning pale. He did not dare ask his wife what she had been dreaming, so, kissing her, he said :

"I am very sleepy, good-night."

"Good-morning, rather!" said his wife, laughing, whilst Bérard went to his room, thinking to himself, "But no, it's impossible, she cannot have dreamed the truth!"

IV.

ABOUT two o'clock that afternoon, a stylish brougham drove up to the house occupied by Bérard and Co., Rue d'Enghien. A woman, still young, charming in the veil which concealed her face, dressed in the latest fashion, got out, went into the shop and said :

"Monsieur Bérard?"

"He is not here, madame," replied a clerk, rushing forward to meet the young lady. "If you will kindly go into the office, I will ascertain whether he is in his private apartments."

The young lady followed the clerk, and sat down in the office.

"Would you give me your name, madame?"

"The lady who came yesterday—he is expecting me."

"I will be back in one minute, madame," said the clerk with a surprised look, and a singular smile.

He went out of the office and was about to go upstairs to the private apartments, when he was stopped by the messenger who had received Bérard's instructions the previous day. This man said :

"I forgot to tell you yesterday that Monsieur Bérard would not be at home all day to-day."

"But there is a lady here who says he made an appointment with her for to-day."

"Ah! the lady who came yesterday."

"Yes."

"He told me he tell her, if she came again, that as he cannot meet her to-day, he begs her to write informing him of the object of her visit."

"Very good."

The clerk returned to the lady, who was anxiously awaiting his return ; with a trembling voice, she asked :

"Well, sir?"

"He is not at home, madame."

Jeanne de Sillac heaved a sigh of satisfaction, whilst the clerk continued :

"M. Bérard had an appointment before he received your card, and begs you to excuse him."

"But when could I see him?"

"He begs you to write and tell him the motive of your visit."

"The motive of my visit?"

"Yes, madame."

"But they must have lost my card, they probably merely told him a lady had called."

"No, madame, or at least, I think not."

"But it's impossible!"

"Not having had the honour to receive you yesterday, madame, kindly allow me to question the messenger who gave your card to M. Bérard."

The clerk called the messenger in, and said to him :

"Did you give this lady's card to M. Bérard?"

"No, sir."

"No?"

"No, he had gone to Neuilly, so I put the card on the table, as I always do in such cases. He was working all night, I found him in the office when I arrived this morning, and he asked me who presented this card—"

"And?"

"And I told him."

"Well, what then?"

"He said he did not know what it meant."

"He didn't know what the card meant?" exclaimed Linotte.

"No, madame."

"He didn't recognize the name?"

"No, madame."

Linotte was thunderstruck. Had Lorémont sent her on a wild goose chase? Deceived by the similarity in the names, by some singular resemblance, it looked as if he had sent her to some peaceful private citizen's house! She felt frightened, but determined to obtain further information.

"But he read the name on the card, and the line written underneath?"

"I don't know what was written on the card, I simply took it into M. Bérard's office."

Linotte understood that she had just made a great mistake.

"And he did not remember my name?"

"I can't say, madame."

"In short, what did he say?"

"Tell the lady exactly what M. Bérard said!" exclaimed the clerk.

"He asked who brought this card, I replied that it was a lady, who seemed to want to see him personally. He then said, 'I am sorry I cannot receive her at the time named, as I have a previous appointment. Request the lady to write explaining the motives of her visit.'"

"And that's all?"

"Yes, madame."

Linotte bent down her head and meditated. The clerk smiled at the messenger, and said:

"If you would like to see *Madame Bérard*, mademoiselle, I will at once inform her."

"Oh! no, no," said Linotte, "I will call again to-morrow."

She then got up, set her dress in order, lowered her veil and went out.

"Do you wish to leave any message for M. Bérard, madame?" asked the clerk.

"Only what I have just told you: that I will call again to-morrow."

"Very good, madame."

Linotte then went out, the obsequious clerk conducting her to her carriage. When he got back, he said to his fellow clerks in the office:

"Oh! my boys, here's a joke! The pure and austere M. Bérard has a—"

"A what?" asked the clerks.

"Why, a mistress!"

"Never!"

"I have just put her in her carriage. He had probably given her a false address, and, she, finding out the real one, came to fetch him. But he prudently kept out of the way."

"You think that's it?"

"Rather. Besides, you'll see for yourselves," said the clerk, calling the messenger, who came at once.

"Now then, you'll see for yourselves," he repeated. "Jean, what do you think that lady is who just called for M. Bérard?"

"Oh, that's not my business, I would rather have nothing to say about it."

"Come, we sha'n't say anything to him about it, it's quite between ourselves."

"Oh ! as for me, I am deaf, dumb, and blind. I keep my place."

"But there's no harm in telling us."

"Come, Jean, come !" exclaimed the other clerks.

"Well, I really think she is simply a 'professional beauty.'"

"Ah ! Ah !" exclaimed the clerks in chorus, "tell us all about it, Jean."

"Tell us everything, Jean."

"Oh ! it's very simple. Yesterday this lady came ; when M. Bérard heard of it, he appeared not to know her."

"Oh ! we know those airs."

"But," continued Jean, "I really believe he did not know her name, for she had written underneath, 'Linotte will come to-morrow.'"

"Linotte, Linotte, does any one know that name ?"

As no one replied, one of them exclaimed :

"There's a name for you !"

"That is not her real name, for 'Jeanne de Sillac' was printed on her card."

"Ah ! Ah !" exclaimed several of them.

"Jeanne de Sillac," said a clerk, "that's the girl who goes to the Casino every evening, she has been a great swell in her time, but she has since met with a misfortune."

"Well, my boys," said the clerk who had received Linotte, "never trust the governor's sanctimonious airs, nor his preaching about a family life."

"Yes, Jeanne's family."

At that moment a clerk who was at the door leading to the private apartments, whistled softly to warn his colleagues ; in a moment they all ran to their places and plunged into their work with feverish ardour. The whistle was to announce the arrival of M. Bérard, who soon after came into the office and went straight to his desk.

"You see," whispered one of the clerks, "he had not left the house."

At that moment, Bérard called for Jean, the clerks glanced at one another and smiled. Jean went up to his master, who said :

"Did that woman come ?"

"Mademoiselle Jeanne de Sillac ?"

"Yes."

"Yes, sir, she has only just gone out."

"I am sorry I did not get back earlier," said Bérard, then he added in a careless tone, "What did she say ?"

"She said she would call again to-morrow."

Bérard turned pale, but quickly recovering himself, he asked :

"Did she state the motives of her visit ?"

"No, sir ; when I asked her whether she would like to see Madame Bérard, she replied in the negative," said Jean, in a hypocritical tone of voice.

Bérard shuddered.

"She said it was you she wanted to see," continued Jean.

"Very good !"

The force of will Bérard employed during that moment was enormous ; this woman with his wife ! He could almost have strangled Jean ! He felt he could not remain exposed to the curious gaze of his clerks, so he took a document from his desk, and went back to his private apartments. Shut up in his own room, he tore his hair with rage ; and sobbed out : "And will this last for ever ? Will they kill me about the past !"

V.

WHEN Linotte got into her carriage she drew down the blinds, threw herself into a corner, and began thinking over her visit, musing to herself: "But it's impossible that the man I knew, a workman, earning five francs a day, with no education, no knowledge of business, can be the chief of the house I have just left—Lorémont must be mistaken—and as, after all, he runs no risk, he has pushed me forward—and it is I who will be caught. Let me see, sixteen years ago, Jacques was twenty-two years old, he is now, therefore, thirty-eight—condemned to ten years penal servitude, he left the galleys five years ago, and without a penny, naturally. He often told me he had never known his father or mother, and he cannot have found the money to purchase such a large business as this. Lorémont is mad! and I ought to have seen it the day he began to talk about millions—People don't earn millions in five years—this Jacques Bérard must be a namesake of the man I once knew."

Linotte, soon after coming out of prison, was afraid of meeting the man she had accused in the affair of the Bridge de l'Estacade, and had consulted her lawyer on the subject. The latter had reassured her by quoting Article 47, which placed all those who had been condemned to penal servitude under police supervision. Suddenly remembering this conversation with her lawyer she exclaimed: "Certainly, the law forbids him settling down in Paris, he is under police supervision, and cannot possibly occupy such a position as this—Lorémont is certainly mad! Besides, this is easy to be seen, considering that this Bérard, on reading my name, said: 'I don't know this lady, tell her to write to me,' but it is just what he should be afraid of, a written communication! It's a dream," said Linotte to herself, "a happy dream!" She smiled, as she nestled in the corner of the carriage, with half-closed eyes, and it seemed as if, whilst she was speaking of dreams, that, like Danaë, she could see a deluge of gold falling at her feet. "But this portrait!" said she, all at once, "it's very strange! the portrait is like him, he is handsomer, much handsomer. But now I come to think of it, Jacques was born of parents who abandoned him, and yet he must have borne his parent's name; another son may have been born, and Jacques may have been sacrificed to this son—Hence the resemblance—I bet it's that—Suppose this man were Jacques' brother we could still make something by that, I'll mention it to Lorémont. After all," said Linotte, sitting up, and looking complacently at her elegant dress, "whatever happens, I have got what I wanted." The carriage stopped, Linotte got out, and found she was just opposite the Restaurant Brébant, where Lorémont had arranged to meet her. The baron was anxiously looking out for her at a window on the first floor. He immediately came down to meet his partner, and, as soon as she entered the private room where they were to dine, he closed the door, and said:

"Well?"

"Well," replied Linotte, taking off her gloves and sitting down on the sofa, "I think you have made a mistake."

"What!" exclaimed the baron, passing his hand over his forehead as if to dissipate the cloud that was hanging over his mind. Linotte took her place at the table, whilst Lorémont sat down opposite her. The waiter coming in, they said nothing for a moment, at the expiration of which the baron said to the waiter

"Serve up the dinner."

When the soup, the *hors d'œuvre*, and *entrées* had been served up, the baron locked the door of the room and going and taking his place beside Jeanne, he said :

"Now you can speak ; what took place ? Did you see him ?"

"No."

"You didn't see him ! Who received you ?"

"A clerk. He told me that when M. Bérard saw my card yesterday, he appeared greatly surprised, as if he did not recognize the name !"

"But had you put Linotte, on your card ?"

"Certainly !"

"And he read it ?"

"Yes, and it appears that he understood less than ever."

"You astonish me. And yet I have received something that proves to me—"

The baron stopped all at once.

"What ?" said Jeanne, eagerly.

"I will explain about that afterwards. Tell me what took place during your visit."

"But that's all ! He said that, obliged to be absent to-day, he begged me to write explaining the object of my visit, and to call another day."

"But it can't be possible ! Come !"

"But it is so possible, that, as I tell you, I was received very politely, I was quite in a position to do as I liked, either to wait, to call again, or see Madame Bérard."

"Madame Bérard ?"

"He had given no orders on the subject and my rather prompt refusal made the clerk smile. I must have compromised the poor man in his own house, for they took me for a professional beauty."

"But this portrait ?" said the baron, taking the photograph out of his pocket.

"Ah ! yes, the portrait—it resembles him somewhat, but it flatters him. Listen to me, Lorémont, I have just remembered something you may not be aware of."

"What's that ?"

"Jacques often told me he was born in wedlock, and bore his father's name, that his mother died, when he was two years old, and that his father had abandoned him. But the father may have had another child who would naturally bear the same names, and this other child may resemble Jacques—there would be nothing strange in that—we may be dealing with a brother by a second marriage. In any case, you will observe that he is equally interested in purchasing our silence."

Lorémont was looking in the pocket-book from which he had taken the photograph, and did not reply ; Linotte continued :

"What I am saying is all the more probable from the fact that it would be utterly impossible for any man to attain to such a position in five years—for he was condemned to ten years penal servitude."

"But he only served seven years," said Lorémont, shrugging his shoulders impatiently, "he was pardoned."

"Ah ! I didn't know that. But he is still subject to the Article of the Code which deprives him of his civil rights and places him under police supervision. Therefore it cannot be—"

"But that is just what we are working on!" exclaimed the baron.

"I know nothing further, I have told you what took place, judge for yourself, I don't think it is Jacques."

The baron drew a letter from his pocket-book and handed it to Linotte, saying:

"If it isn't him, what does this letter mean?"

"A letter?"

"See for yourself."

Taking the letter, Linotte went up to the window, as it was getting dusk, and read as follows:—"Monsieur Hippolyte Lorémont, Lord Eymond, Baron de Lormond. Be careful what you are doing, if you have time, stop at once, for we are watching you. You are about to commit a bad action, but our ruin will involve yours, you may feel quite sure. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; you will be found out, and we shall prove it was you who organised the robbery at Bérard's, at the Ile de la Grand Jatte—keep your own counsel—look after your own business, and say nothing, or—look out for yourself. Take our advice, and forget the firm of Bérard and Co. We have our eyes on you, and should you stir, we will divulge everything."

"Who can have written you such a letter?" said Linotte.

"I really cannot guess—and yet I have an idea—"

"Tell me your idea," said Linotte, anxiously.

"I fancy that as soon as Jacques took this business, and became someone, he must have obtained information about all those who might know too much about his past life. He knew you were still alive, and had you watched. When you left your card at his house, he was not there; when he returned home and found it, he was alone; he therefore had time to parry the blow. He probably sent to your house, and they told him about my visits to you. Belida would be only too delighted to talk about you, especially since the change in your position. He sees what we are aiming at, and has written this letter, to frighten me."

"You must be mad to think such a thing!"

"No, no, I am not mad."

"Were he afraid of you, could he imagine what you were doing, he would at once inform the Police—"

"He! go to the Police Station?"

"He or his doorkeeper, and you would be arrested the next day,"—said Linotte, with intentional ferocity, calmly looking at her companion. The baron turned livid, but recovering himself, he said:—

"But why do you talk to me like that?"

Linotte, reclining on the sofa in a graceful attitude, smiled, and replied in her sweetest tones:—

"Because I am convinced you are mistaken, that this letter is not from him, and that it refers to quite another affair altogether—because, *fortunately*, I know you well enough to be aware that the Commissary of Police is the very man you don't want to meet—because, *unfortunately*, I know you well enough to feel sure that if the affair failed, you would want me to return the articles you have bought me—But you would make a great mistake! this being the case, and I tell you at once so that we may both know exactly how we stand towards each other. Let us now go on with our dinner."

Lorémont was astounded by this audacious speech, and could hardly conceal his anger. However, he sat down, and after a few minutes' silence,

during which they were eating, he resumed in a humble tone, quite different to what he had hitherto adopted :—

“So Linotte, you think we ought not to continue?”

“I am ready to do the needful, and will not break the promise I made; but I think we shall lose our time.”

“But yet—Listen, Linotte, I am not a child at this work; before commencing a job destined to lead to such important results, I obtained full information; I made inquiries everywhere, even amongst Bérard’s own relations.”

“His relations,” exclaimed Jeanne.

“Yes, I asked young Mousson—”

“Young Mousson, Adolphe Fontaine?”

“Yes, that’s his brother-in-law.”

“Ah! ah!” said Linotte, bursting out into loud laughter. “That’s a good joke!”

“What are you laughing at?”

“Oh! nothing.”

“But you must confess,” continued the baron, “that this coincidence would be very extraordinary, the same name.”

“I believe I have already told you what I suppose to be the reason.”

“The same name would be nothing, but the same face—”

“Oh! the same face! Oh! oh! you are going too far—”

When Linotte wanted to talk bravely, she knew what means to employ. This was to stimulate her courage by drinking freely of some generous wine; she was now doing this, and was already getting quite merry.

“You know,” said she, “that he is a charming fellow, judging by the portrait you showed me. It resembles Jacques somewhat, it’s true, but, if it is really my former sweetheart, it would be more dangerous than useful to send me to him.”

“Why so?”

“Why?—because a woman always loves a man who has done what Jacques did for me—and who, having become handsomer than ever—”

“But you must be crazy, the man is married!”

“It’s true, but—”

“He has children—”

“That’s another thing!—and I prefer that it should not be Jacques.”

“But you frighten me, Linotte—I begin to doubt—”

“Come, give me this portrait, and let me take another look at it.”

Lorémont drew the portrait from his pocket-book, and gave it to Jeanne; the latter looked at it, smiling, then going closer to the light, she suddenly started up, exclaiming :—“But it really is Jacques!” On hearing this, the baron got up, and, leaning over the young girl’s shoulder, looked at the portrait, trying to discover the particular mark, which had suddenly transformed Linotte’s doubts into a certainty.

“So you have recognized him at last?”

“Oh! yes, yes!”

“It’s really he?”

“Yes, it’s he.”

“How do you recognize him?”

“By that!” said the young girl, pointing with trembling finger to his forehead.

“But what is it?”

“Don’t you see that scar on his forehead?”

"Yes, what of that?"

"An hour before the murder—just outside the ballroom—when Le Charpentier knocked him down, and my poor sweetheart's head came in contact with the corner of the flagstone, he bled—and I can see him still, as he caught us up near the Bridge, his face covered with blood—I could see him by the aid of the lightning—In court, during the trial, the wound, which was hardly closed up, was still red—Do you see the scar running from the eye to the top of his head?"

"That scar?" said the baron, pointing to the line across the forehead of the portrait.

"Yes."

The baron then returned to his seat, so as to get a better view of his companion's face. Linotte had dropped the photograph, and sat leaning with her elbows on the table, gazing at the picture in silence.

"So you are now thoroughly convinced it is he?" asked Lorémont.

Gently nodding her head, she replied in a low voice, "Yes, I am quite sure of it." Lorémont gazed intently at his accomplice, trying to read in her eyes what was going on in her mind, but the girl, keeping her eyes obstinately fixed on the portrait, became thoughtful, smiled, then her lips moved as if she had said something. After having waited for ten minutes, Lorémont said:—

"You are certain we are not mistaken, you are still determined to go, Linotte?"

"Yes, I am determined to see him."

"Determined to continue what we have commenced?"

"I intend to see him."

"You must see him face to face."

"I must see him."

"You must say the same thing to the clerk, when you call again."

"Yes, and I will see him."

"Once you have managed to speak to him, he will see we are determined to continue, whatever he may do."

"Ah! to see him again!" murmured Linotte, still gazing at the photograph. And hearing only the latter part of Lorémont's remark, "He will find me greatly changed."

"What do you say?" asked the baron.

Unconscious of what she was saying, replying to her own thoughts, she said:—"I feel fifteen years younger, and it seems but yesterday that I left him, and now I am going to see him again. Oh! how strange it is to have loved and to come together again after such a long time."

"I really don't understand what you are talking about," said the baron, anxiously, seeing that his accomplice looked very much like going over to the enemy, their victim.

"The fact is I still love him!" said Linotte, raising her head.

"What! you love him—you abandon—"

"No, I will go and see him, I must and—"

"And?"

"And if I find the man I once knew, I shall love—"

"But he is married and father of a family—and you would certainly ruin him."

"You don't understand what I mean when I say I love him."

The baron shrugged his shoulders, and said to himself:—"She's tipsy." He filled up the glasses, they chinked, and he drank, thinking to himself,

"I have found out what I wanted to know—to-morrow, she will change her mind."

Jeanne seemed to be a thousand leagues away, the poor girl was not very strong in the head, and a few glasses of wine had sufficed to trouble her brain. Entirely absorbed by the souvenirs evoked by the portrait, she quite forgot the baron. When the dinner was over, he put her into her carriage, gave the driver the address, and said to Jeanne:—

"To-morrow morning, I will call at your house, and we will talk the matter over."

Nestling in a corner of her brougham, Linotte made no reply, but pressing the portrait to her bosom, and raising her eyes, she murmured:—

"Poor dear Jacques, how delighted I shall be to see him again!"

VI.

THE baron walked home; he lived at the corner of the Rue Duphot, in bachelor quarters, and his rooms looked out on the boulevard. He was in a very anxious, thoughtful mood, Jeanne's manner frightened him. Since he had given her the five hundred francs, since her new dress had made her look younger and smarter, and she had found out Lorémont could not do without her, she had totally changed her manners, tone, and language, and it was she who now appeared to be directing the baron. But that was not his only reason for anxiety. The day following the affair of the Ile de la Grande-Jatte, when he went to draw the money for the stolen goods, Père Lanout declared he had only received half the goods announced by Lorémont. The portion sent by Grosbouleau and Lalongueur to Courbevoie had no doubt been seized, and the culprits arrested, for from that day forth neither Grosbouleau, Lalongueur nor Petite had returned to the "Peau de Lapin," and no one had seen anything of them. The baron was convinced his accomplices were in the hands of the police, and was in constant fear lest they should inform against him, and thus get him arrested also. None of those people knew his real name, and he took care not to go near the "Lapin."

But that was not all, twenty minutes after he left Lelia d'Equermoise's house, the police had made a raid there, and all the "ladies" present had been arrested. Young Adolphe Fontaine, caught with the cards in his hands, just when he was winning heavily, could find nothing else to say to the commissary who proved to him that the cards he was using were marked, but that they had been given to the servant Baptistine, by Lorémont. It was evident that when Adolphe came to be examined he would not fail to declare that he took the cards from a certain Baron de Lormond, a well-known man about town, too well-known even by the police agents specially appointed to look after these gambling houses. Lorémont felt he was being hunted down, that his fortune and life depended on the affair he was now engaged in with Linotte. But they would have to act promptly, and whilst walking along, he pondered over what he had best do.

"I was wrong," said he to himself, "to let Linotte go back to her own house, I ought to have taken her to my place, the slightest indiscretion might ruin me. We are now in the best part of the year, I have still a few thousand francs, we could go to a spot about fifteen or twenty miles from Paris, to some nice house—an hour's ride would bring us to Paris whenever

we might want to come—and once the business was over, we should be safe from any denunciation.” He looked round to make sure he was not being followed, and was astounded to see Linotte passing along the boulevard, reclining with careless grace in an open carriage. “This is coming it too strong!” exclaimed Lorémont. “She’s going to the Bois, as happy and unconcerned as if there was not the slightest risk. Ah! those who sur-named her ‘Linotte’ must have known her well, however, I need not be anxious about her, she is too frivolous to do any harm.” He drew a long breath, as if relieved from a great weight, when suddenly he jumped forward, having felt a hand placed on his shoulder and heard a voice say:—“Ah! I’ve found you at last!” A shiver ran through his whole body; gathering together all his strength, understanding that on the boulevard a struggle was impossible, he was preparing for flight when he perceived the merry features of the young Viscount d’Aumard, who was walking along arm-in-arm with his friend the Count de Mont-Perret.

“My dear fellow,” said the viscount, “I am delighted to see you, you don’t know what happened after you went away—But, Good Heavens! have you been ill, you look wonderfully queer?”

“Yes, I’ve been ill,” replied Lorémont, hardly able to recover the shock, “I was in bed for two days.”

“So, you know nothing?”

“Nothing whatever.”

“I need not tell you that Lelia is a dishonest woman, for if I said the contrary, you would be greatly astonished. But that’s not all, we were robbed.”

“Really!”

“You know the young man who took your cards and cried out:—‘I go five francs!’”

“Ah! yes, Young Mousson.”

“Young Mousson, that’s it! He is simply a swindler of the deepest dye.”

“Really!” exclaimed the baron, with an adorable gesture of surprise.

“Oh! I rather think he is! He changed our cards for others he had no doubt brought in his pocket. If the commissary had not taken the trouble to come to that charming party, he would have won twice as much. Mont-Perret lost seventy thousand francs as it was.”

“But he will return the money.”

“Return the money; the money is at the Record Office, and young Mousson and the ladies are at the Prefecture. If they return anything, it won’t be the money, you may be sure. We are living under a Government which poses as being the protector of public order—money is like the Imperial Guard, it never surrenders!”

Immensely proud of this brilliant joke, the “dude” dragged his friend off towards the Café Riche, saying: “Good-day, baron, good-day.” The latter, left alone, became more anxious than ever; instead of going home he jumped into a cab and drove to the railway station, where he took a ticket for Saint-Germain, saying to himself: “I can come to Paris every day, but I feel I must go into the country, and don’t intend to go back to my lodgings until this affair of Lelia d’Equermoise’s is settled.”

VII.

THE evening of the day on which Linotte called on Bérard, the Fontaines paid a visit to their son-in-law. As soon as M. Fontaine perceived his daughter, he exclaimed:

"We have just had fresh news."

"And what is it?"

"Ah! what a misfortune!" groaned Madame Fontaine.

"These things never happen to anyone else but us," said M. Fontaine.

"There certainly must be some mistake."

"Of course there is some mistake. So long as he stopped with me, or was with people of whom I was quite sure, I would have replied as you did, but he has mixed with all these clerks and messengers."

"But what's the matter?" asked Madame Bérard, anxiously.

"The matter is that Adolphe is arrested."

"You don't say so!"

"But I do."

"Oh! great heavens! but what has he done?"

"He has simply satisfied the passion for gambling that he acquired in your husband's office."

"Father, pray don't say that, my husband has got nothing to do with Adolphe's vices."

"Oh! I know very well you love your husband better than your parents. I know you believe in him and not in us; however he did not gamble before coming here. This house is managed so strictly," added Fontaine, ironically, "that the few friends he made, drunkards and gamblers, have led the unfortunate man away, and to-day, my son, my only son, the child who bears my name, is in prison as a swindler and a gambler, and I have come to ask your husband to come with me to-morrow and take him out; it is only right that he should repair the harm he has done."

"Oh! father!" exclaimed Madame Bérard.

"The harm done in his office, if you prefer that way of putting it."

"But Jacques will be delighted to go with you."

"I hope so. He might come upstairs."

"He isn't there."

"He knew we should come to-day, and it would have been only polite on his part to be here," said Madame Fontaine.

"But he is coming back, mother."

"Besides," said Fontaine, sitting down, and taking out his handkerchief, "we must support our position. Ah! we are not rich! we have no sleeping partner. I—I work alone, always alone, getting up early and going to bed late. When I was six years old I earned my own living. If my children are not grateful to me so much the worse for them. They say of me, 'Père Fontaine, ah! there's an honest man if you like.' If I am not rich it is because I have nothing that I have not earned."

"But, father, we are always—"

"Ah! very good, very good, I see what you mean," and the old man got up and walked across the room. "You are going to taunt me with the pension you pay me. I am wrong to be so old, but I shall not last long."

Madame Bérard ran towards her father weeping; kissing him, she said:

"Oh! father, but I have done nothing to you."

Fontaine said nothing, but looked at his wife, who, upright as a dart, was listening to her husband, then, turning towards her daughter, she said:

"It's true, you are good, my child, you love us and we love you; what I say is not intended for you."

"But by abusing my husband you pain me."

"It's true, I forgot that you love him better than those who have brought you up. I will say no more—I will wait—"

"This child is young, Désiré, she does not understand how we must suffer, we who are so good-hearted," said Madame Fontaine to her husband.

The door opened, and Bérard came in; their manner changed at once, and they both met him with their most gracious and obsequious smiles.

"I beg your pardon, dear papa and mamma," said Bérard smiling, "I have kept you waiting a little. Let's sit down to table at once, and talk over matters."

They then went into the dining-room. We will take advantage of this to describe Madame Bérard's amiable parents. Fontaine was about fifty-seven, and was certainly the most disagreeable and ridiculous father-in-law that could be found anywhere. Winter and summer he wore the same costume; black cloth trousers cut away over the boots, and what boots! a waistcoat that was too small and always dirty, an extraordinary frock-coat, with a dozen pockets in it, one containing his snuff-box, another his large check handkerchief, in a third his pocket-book, and in others his spectacles, purse, &c. &c. His hair was of a dirty grey, and his little eyes were surmounted with two tufts of shaggy hair which he called his eye-brows, and his mouth was small, and his lips thin, his nose was small and very sharp, his nostrils very wide, and he wore a pair of whiskers resembling two rabbits' feet; small-pox had put the finishing touches to this handsome face, for Désiré Fontaine was very strongly marked with the traces of that disease. Notwithstanding all this, he considered himself quite capable of playing the Lovelace amongst the ladies.

Very ignorant, very ill-bred, egoistical and cowardly, he had only brought up his children properly because the law obliged him to do so. He was always repeating the same praise: "I have made myself what I am, for I am a self-made man." He pretended to be a thorough-going Parisian, independent of every party, and would say: "Let who will be a curate, I belong to the parish!" He was master in his own house, and wanted to be the same everywhere else; he wanted to be considered witty, and thought it was merely necessary to talk about everything without understanding in order to deceive the people who listened to him. He acknowledged but one serious *organ*, and that was the "Moniteur Officiel." "That," said he, "is a proper political paper." He scorned the Revolution, on account of its "noble martyrs," and its "assignments." He adored Napoleon, because he died on a rock; *betrayed* by his *generals*, and *sold* to perfidious Albion! He possessed a lithographic portrait of Lafayette, which he placed between his own portrait and that of his wife, Caroline Fontaine, they having been painted life size, "in fine colours," as he said. Having described the husband we will now introduce his wife.

Caroline had brought as a dowry two lovely black eyes, black hair, black skin, a large mouth, and immense teeth, which latter were not very good either, for she had been obliged to purchase a new set when she was about thirty-five. Her ears were also very large, and she was altogether a strong, robust, common-looking woman, who laughed when people mentioned such a thing as consumption to her. As a wife, she felt the greatest indifference for her husband, as a mother, she liked her daughter just well enough not to beat her, but she worshipped her son. Adolphe was her idol, and she would have sold everything to satisfy the slightest whim of this modern Benjamin. She *seemed* to be nobody in the house, and yet

she was everything. She detested her son-in-law, first because he was rich, and also because after having tried her dear son, Bérard had been obliged to send him home again; much to the disgust of Adolphe's parents, who thought that as soon as he got into Bérard's business, he would at once be made junior partner. Caroline had imparted to her husband all the hatred she felt for their son-in-law, and, since Adolphe had been turned out by him, they attributed all the stupid things their son did to the bad company he had met with in Bérard's office. Aimée Bérard was constantly saying she was the happiest of women; but Madame Bérard always insisted on treating her as if she were the most unfortunate of wives, and had fallen into the hands of a brute who would certainly have beaten her had she attempted to make the slightest complaint; but Madame Fontaine knew everything. If it happened that she ever found herself alone in her daughter's house, she would sneak down into the kitchen and try to get the servants to talk about their mistress; but their reserve annoyed her, and out of the most commonplace things she invented the most extraordinary stories. Frequently when about to take her leave, she would press her daughter's hand in a peculiar way, then, suddenly burst into tears, groaning:

"Ah! my poor child!"

"But, mother, I am very happy!" Aimée would say.

"Ah! you're of our flesh and blood—you suffer in silence—poor child!"

"But, mother, I again assure you I am extremely happy."

"Poor thing, your courage terrifies me!"

And without waiting for any reply, off she would walk. The truth is the old woman wished for her son-in-law's death, so as to obtain possession of the business, and carry it on for her grandchildren. She had at first thought of a separation, but had been told that Bérard would still remain at the head of affairs, and would only be required to have his children properly brought up by allowing his wife a pension. They forgot to mention the pension that Bérard paid to his wife's parents, and Caroline immediately gave up all thought of a separation. Bérard was well aware that his wife's friends were his most determined enemies, but knowing how much they had suffered he excused their covetousness, and pretended not to notice their hatred. When the dinner was over Fontaine said to his son-in-law:

"Bérard, I want you to do me a favour."

"Just say what it is; I am at your disposal."

"Oh! thank Heaven! it isn't a question of money, I wouldn't ask you for that," replied Fontaine, who always pretended to suppose that his pension was paid by his daughter, unknown to her husband. This enabled him to adopt a free style of speech with his son-in-law, who was too generous to say anything about the matter.

"Oh! I know that!" replied Bérard.

"My son Adolphe happened to be with some of his friends in a house where gambling was going on—For it appears that the youngsters frequently patronize gambling saloons, and that it is the fashion amongst our modern youth—The police made a raid on the house in question, and arrested my son as if he were a swindler."

"Adolphe is arrested!" exclaimed Bérard, anxiously.

"But the most honest people in the world get arrested sometimes!" grunted Madame Fontaine.

"Yes, my only son is in prison, such are the times we live in now, they

arrest honest people with swindlers, and make no difference between a peaceable citizen and a burglar."

"And what were you going to ask me?"

"I wanted to ask you to come with me to-morrow morning to the Prefecture."

"To the Prefecture of Police!" exclaimed Bérard, turning pale.

"Certainly, you are an elector, and enjoy all your civil rights."

The dinner was over, and every one left the table; Bérard, who was the first to get up, walked into the drawing-room. Fontaine looked at him in astonishment, and then glanced at his wife, Caroline. The latter said:

"But you don't refuse, do you?"

"I don't refuse, but I cannot go with you."

"Well, you refuse then!" said Père Fontaine, turning round suddenly.

"Pray say no more—I refuse!" said Bérard, drily.

And, striking his chest, doing his utmost to remain calm, poor Bérard endeavoured to invent some means of extricating himself from the painful position in which circumstances had placed him. He knew he dared not present himself at the Prefecture of Police, and yet he could not tell his relations he was not entitled to exercise his civil rights. There was only one way of getting out of the dilemma, it was a cruel alternative, but he was obliged to adopt it.

"Monsieur Fontaine," said he, "if I went to claim Adolphe, I should have to say I consider him incapable of committing the crime he is accused of, and to be bail for him. Now, as I have the greatest respect for my word once I give it, I cannot go and say something which I do not myself believe."

"You think my son is a swindler!" roared Madame Fontaine.

"A thief!" yelled Fontaine.

"Ah! what we eat here is very dear!" exclaimed Caroline, who had turned positively green on hearing her darling Adolphe insulted in this way.

Aimée looked at her husband in astonishment, for she had never known him to be so severe before.

"I have a right to speak in this way, Monsieur Fontaine, for if Adolphe left my office, there were very good reasons for it. I said nothing to you about it, but it is my duty to inform you now. Adolphe may be a thief!"

"Good God! what is this I hear? You are calumniating our child," cried Caroline.

"Sir, we are an honest family, children of Paris, if you like, crazy, and careless, but still honest. You have no right to insult our child, when he is groaning in irons."

"Come, Désiré, come away, Aimée must be totally devoid of all feeling to live with a man who despises her parents and insults her unfortunate brother."

"Monsieur Fontaine, I am addressing myself to you, and you only. It's no use letting any one else into the secret of our family troubles."

"Sir, neither your wife's father nor her brother are afraid of any exposure—your calumnies cannot affect them."

"We will never set foot in this house again!" cried Caroline.

"If our daughter loves us, she knows what she ought to do."

"As you like!" answered Bérard, coldly, "I have done my duty."

"And we will do ours!"

"Oh! the affair cannot terminate like this!"

"Adieu ! my child."

"Adieu !"

Aimée was crying bitterly, and looking from her parents to her husband, unable to understand the latter's decided refusal.

"Scoundrel !" exclaimed Madame Fontaine, shaking her fist at her son-in-law, whilst her amiable husband went further still, for he spat on the carpet.

As soon as they had gone, Bérard dropped into an arm-chair, thoroughly exhausted by the efforts he had been obliged to make to conceal his emotion. His weeping wife came and threw herself down on her knees before him, and said :—

"But, Jacques, why were you so cruel, they are rather jealous, but they are not ill-natured."

"Aimée ! Aimée," cried Jacques, taking her in his arms and sobbing, "forgive me, life has its cruel necessities—I was forced to refuse, Aimée, don't ask me anything, I have simply done my duty."

The poor woman said no more, for she was terrified by the sight of her weeping husband.

VIII.

AFTER the family scene we have just related, Bérard went upstairs, and shut himself up in his own room. Opening the window, he snatched off his collar and took a long breath of fresh air ; wondering to himself how he had contrived to remain so calm amidst the frightful scene which had just taken place. He felt the time was coming when he would have to struggle against the past ; wishing to know the worst at once, and, if possible, save himself, he asked himself what was to be done. There was only one thing to be done, and that was to fly ! He must immediately liquidate his affairs, and go away with his wife and children, to some quiet provincial, or better still, some foreign town and live a quiet, secluded life. That was the only thing he could do. But it was almost impossible, for he could not wind up his business a few days after taking possession of it, without causing great astonishment, and leading to inquiries which would result in bringing about exactly what he wished to avoid. His brain, troubled by the card left by Linotte, and the visit with which it was followed up, by his father-in-law's request, and the refusal he had been obliged to oppose to it, was incapable of forming any plan. In order to obtain the quietude necessary as a prelude to the ardent struggle he was about to engage in, he must first find a place of safety and gain time. They were just then in the most agreeable part of the summer, and could go to the seaside, that being the most natural thing in the world at this season of the year. It would appear as if he were deciding on this excursion in order to console his wife for the family quarrel that had just taken place. As soon as this idea occurred to him, he determined to put it into execution.

"Yes," said he, "we will go to Roscoff, in Brittany, far from these people ; there I shall be quiet and able to arrange a plan for the future. If this state of things lasted much longer, I should go mad !" Leaning out of the window, he cast his eyes mechanically into the street, when he perceived a man knocking at the shop shutters. "Who can that be ?" said he to himself. He looked again, and saw a woman come out of the shop, which had been closed for several hours. "What does that mean ? And

this woman, what's she doing?" said Jacques to himself. He at once went down by the staircase leading from his private apartments to the shop, and, walking on tip-toe, went and posted himself behind the half-opened door. The man and the woman were on the pavement, leaning against the shutters, and Bérard could hear distinctly what they were saying. The man asked:—

"He got up in the night?"

"Yes, I think he had made an appointment with some one in the shop," replied the woman.

"And you saw nothing?"

"No, I told you he heard me come downstairs, and asked me what I was doing there at that time of night; I told him that not being accustomed to the ways of the house, I was frightened by seeing the shop lighted up in the middle of the night."

"What did he say to you?"

"Nothing, but I had to return to my room."

"And so you saw nothing?"

"I put out the lights in the kitchen, and watched him from the window overlooking the shop office."

"Well, the baron did not come?"

"No, I saw the governor, gazing at a card until two o'clock; at half past two he went out and put the card into the side pocket of his overcoat."

"Ah! he went out," said the man; "he must have arranged to meet him outside; and what about the card?"

"Oh! you may feel sure that when I was brushing his clothes the next day, I took it out of his pocket."

"Have you got it with you?"

"Yes, there it is."

"But I can't read!" said the man.

"The printed name is 'Jeanne de Sillac,' and then underneath, in a woman's handwriting are the words, 'Linotte will come to-morrow about two o'clock.'"

"Sillac—but that's the woman he goes to see every day."

"How do you know?"

"Lalongueur is on his track; you may be sure we are not going to let ourselves be caught like that."

"But as he hasn't come."

"And Jeanne de Sillac—I tell you he goes to see her every evening."

"All that is very strange."

"We must be very careful."

Bérard was still behind the door, listening intently to what they were saying, the perspiration rolling down his cheeks. The unfortunate man thought to himself:—"But there is a regular plot being laid against me; the baron! Lalongueur!" he repeated, so as to engrave the names on his memory, "I must be dreaming—the woman talking outside is the new servant. Who can have placed her here? Can it be that I am already caught in a trap laid by the police?" And he felt a cold shiver running through his whole frame. The dialogue outside still continued:—

"Has he spoken before you about the affair of the Grande Jatte?"

"Yes, he said he would not make any complaint, that he preferred to let the matter rest, for it was no use complaining."

"That shows he's an intelligent man."

"They told him that, for the public good, he ought to do it, but he has always refused to do so."

"In short, there's nothing to fear from him, but we must keep our eye on Linotte—"

"But who is this Linotte?"

"An old friend of the baron's."

"Well, I think it's no use my stopping here any longer."

"Oh! you can't go away yet, stay another few days."

"But I am very miserable without you, Eugène."

"The day after to-morrow you can come back, my dear;" said Grosboulleau—the reader has probably recognised him—"Go in again, they might see us. We are now going to look after the baron and Jeanne de Sillac; we must find out what they are up to together, and, if necessary, get rid of them—If you have anything to tell us, let us know at once, cost what it may."

"Where do you live now?"

"Ah! it's true, I haven't given you our new address—you'll see what a fine place we've got—Lalongueur found it out—84 Route d'Argenteuil. The whole house belongs to us, with its stables, coach-house, and garden—We have two dogs and a horse which Lalongueur bought for thirty francs."

"How I should like to be with you!"

"You will be in two days' time, my dear Petite. I must go now."

Whilst they were taking a parting kiss, Bérard returned to his room, repeating, so as not to forget it:—"Lalongueur, 84 Route d'Argenteuil. He's watching Linotte—I cannot understand his reason—but I think these people may be useful to me."

When Petite left Grosboulleau, she returned to the private apartments and listened at all the doors. Finding that everything was quiet, she returned to her room, saying to herself:—"In two days' time I shall be in the country." Bérard went to bed, and thought:—"To-morrow I will get up early, go down to the office and give my usual orders, and at two o'clock, we will take the train—once at Roscoff, I can make my plans—Ah! if I could see Cardinet to-morrow—I will go and see if he is at home—he will be able to give me some good advice." Feeling much calmer, the unfortunate man fell asleep.

IX.

THE next day, about ten a.m. Bérard went up to the fourth storey of a house in the Rue de l'Arsenal, knocked at the door and heard a voice within respond, "Come in!" He at once entered the modestly furnished room; one which served as ante-chamber, drawing-room, and dining-room. There was a piano, picked up in the auction-rooms, one of those instruments known to the initiated as *strummers*, and the master of the establishment was playing on it. He turned round to see who it was coming to disturb his interview with the Muses, and on recognising Bérard, he cried out:

"Ah! good-morning—not a word. I own I am wrong to have stopped a fortnight without calling on your charming wife and children—I must and do apologise. But be quiet and listen to what I dashed off yesterday—I am just running over it this morning on the piano, and I am really astonished myself at the beauty of the theme."

"But I wanted to—"

"Be quiet, pagan, and listen—"

"I'm listening," said Bérard, sitting down close to the piano.

The poet thwacked the piano and began to sing the first verse of a nautical poem, describing the doughty deeds performed by a certain French frigate, *Le Vengeur*.

"Splendid!" cried Bérard, "splendid! But I wanted to—"

"Silence, man of business, be quiet, and listen. This is the first time you have ever been so close to the Muses of Poetry and Music."

The piano groaned again and the inspired musician commenced the second verse of this famous nautical poem.

"Now it's the fright!" he exclaimed. "Listen—the prelude—the cannon"—And the poor piano groaned again as the enthusiastic musician thumped away to describe the horrors of a naval combat, very much as young lady beginners play the "Battle of Prague." "What do you think of that?" said Cardinet, turning round to his friend, who was listening to this musical treat with the air of a man receiving a *douche* of icy-cold water just as he gets out of bed. Nothing daunted, the poet and the piano plunged into a third verse, containing the sequel of the combat; when this was finished, Bérard was about to speak, but when Cardinet was in a moment of inspiration he was not to be stopped by anyone or anything. Thumping his piano with renewed energy, he commenced a fourth verse of his famous "poem," and this was descriptive of the return of the victorious frigate, to the port of Brest.

"Well?" said the poet after having given a final and terrible thump on the long-suffering piano—"Well?"

Bérard said nothing, for he was afraid a word of approbation might be construed as an *Encore*, or that the slightest attempt at criticism might bring on a discussion during which a fresh performance would be found necessary. As we say he held his tongue.

"As before all works of genius, you stand in mute admiration. But you have heard and understood it, and I am satisfied. Now, as you want to speak to me, I am all attention."

"Yes, I do want to speak to you, and on a very grave subject."

"Go on."

"I have come to consult you about an important affair, and one which we had foreseen," said Bérard, pointedly.

"An affair of importance which we had foreseen?" repeated Cardinet, suddenly changing his tone and manner.

"I told you so," said Bérard, smiling, "but your thoughts were elsewhere just then."

"It's true, Jacques, and I beg your pardon; what's the matter?"

"Listen, you know all about my career, don't you?"

"Yes, we met in a very disagreeable place—four years that Bonaparte gave me as a souvenir of himself,"—then taking Jacques' hand affectionately, he continued, "Of course I don't mean that for you, Jacques, we were both employed in the office, you related your faults to me—"

"My crime!" said Jacques, correcting him.

"Your crime then—which brought you there; after all your crime was simply a duel between common people, savages—two males fighting for a female—put the woman into a drawing-room, put yourself and your antagonist into dress suits, you fight with swords and kill your man! the court would acquit you and award you a brevet of bravery, you would create a

sensation in society, the women would run after you, and you would be all the fashion ; you were wrong not to be rich when you did it."

"And now I am a murderer."

"But look at me, I was compromised in the affair of the bombs ; if we had succeeded I should have been a grand citizen, but we were caught, and I am or was a galley slave ! But, in spite of all that, we are honest men, my dear fellow."

"You lower yourself in order to console me," said Bérard, quite aware of the difference that existed between the two crimes.

"Come, I know what it is, you want me, let's say no more about that."

"I have come to ask your advice."

"What is it ?"

"The woman who was the cause of my crime, who aided me, and made me commit it is still alive."

"Very good."

"And she has been to my house."

"To your house !"

"Yes, she insists on seeing me. Up to the present I have feigned not to recognise the name, and left word that she must write and tell me the purport of her visit ; but she refuses to do so, and says she wants to see me personally."

"The deuce ! they know you are rich and probably want to blackmail you. Someone might see this woman."

"But I fancy she is not alone."

"What makes you think that ?"

"Certain details I have got."

"If you want me to give you my opinion, you must tell me everything."

"That's what I intended to do. Listen."

Bérard then told Cardinet about Linotte's two visits, his quarrel with Fontaine because he refused to go to the Prefecture of Police and bail out the latter's son Adolphe, his discovery just outside his shop, and what he had heard, and finally mentioned the necessity for some cool advice, feeling that he himself was quite unable to consider the matter calmly. When he had finished, Cardinet shook his head, and said :

"It's very grave ! But now, answer me clearly, so that I may fully understand the case."

"I am all attention."

"Who is this Linotte, whom they described as an old flame of the baron's ?"

"I really don't know ; she passes under the name of Jeanne de Sillac now."

"Jeanne de Sillac !" exclaimed Cardinet, "why I know her well ; she is often at the Café du Rat-Mort."

"The Café du Rat-Mort ?"

"Yes ; a place I go to every evening. She is a good-natured girl, though rather stupid, if it's the same. Why, we can soon find out all about the matter."

"What do you intend doing ?"

"Listen, and I will explain my plan. Under the pretence of going to the seaside, you will take your family to Roscoff as you intended. When people call at your house the servants will reply : 'Mr. Bérard has gone away for a fortnight.' What more natural ? They will then wait. During this time, I will look about and ascertain what connection there is between a baron, Jeanne de Sillac, your servant, M. Lalongueur and Eugène.

When once we have found out who these people are and what they are doing, we will take further steps in the matter."

"And you don't mind doing all that?"

"Certainly not."

"How grateful I am—"

"Don't be so silly— Now run away. Pack up your trunks, and go away this evening. Tell your people you have instructed me to look after the correspondence."

"But why don't you come to breakfast with me?"

"That's a good idea!—but no, I want to correct my poem, 'Le Vengeur,'" replied the poet, sitting down at the piano and trying over certain parts of that nautical masterpiece.

"So you won't come?" said Bérard, terrified on hearing the piano again.

"Yes, yes; but I must copy it out again; I will be at your house in an hour's time."

"I shall quite expect you."

"All right."

"Well, good-bye for the present."

"Good-bye."

Bérard went downstairs, and half-an-hour afterwards, arrived at his house just as a carriage stopped there and a lady got out. She saw Jacques and their eyes met. He shuddered, and feeling that his strength was failing him, leant up against the wall. The lady threw herself into one corner of the carriage, and he distinctly heard her say: "'Tis he," as she drove off. Bérard heaved a sigh of relief. He had felt afraid that on seeing him Linotte would get out to speak to him. The latter thought to herself? "It's true he was not there—he did not refuse to see me—it is only by chance that I met him—he recognised me— How handsome he is! I could see by his manner that he would receive me— I shall not tell Lorémont I have seen him." And the young girl seemed very happy at this meeting of which she had so long been dreaming.

X.

IN accordance with Cardinet's advice, Bérard immediately made preparations for going away. When he told his wife what he had decided to do, she thanked him heartily, thinking that it was for the sake of herself and the children he was thus sacrificing his business. She was very pleased at the thought of leaving Paris for a few days, as she would thus avoid the complaints and recriminations of her parents, who would not fail to call on her should she remain in Paris. Cardinet strengthened her in this idea, by telling her that her husband had decided to go away to console her for the painful scene that had taken place the day before. At four o'clock they were all at the railway station, and took all the servants with them, except Petite, who, having refused to leave Paris, had been paid and discharged immediately. Bérard, his arm linked in that of Cardinet, walked up and down the waiting-room, whilst waiting for the departure of the train.

"It's understood," said Bérard, "that you will go to my house every day and look after the correspondence."

"Yes."

"You will do the needful. As regards the business generally, my manager will see to that."

"All right."

"You will try and see all these people."

"I shall commence looking for them in an hour's time ; if it's the Made-moiselle de Sillac that I know, it won't take long."

"I've described her to you."

"Yes ; it's just her style, except the fashionable dress and the brougham -- especially the brougham--"

"However, you will see."

"I will see, and you shall be kept well informed. I will soon demolish this spider's web ; you give me full authority to treat with them ?"

"Certainly."

"I will write to you in verse--"

"Come, come, be serious."

"What, you don't think my verses are serious then ?"

"Certainly."

The bell rang, and the train was about to start.

"Good-bye ; I count on you."

"Adieu ! Be quite easy."

Bérard and his family got into the carriage, and the train steamed out of the station, whilst Cardinet took a seat on the top of an omnibus as far as the Rue des Martyres ; there he got down and went into a café, looking at his watch and remarking : "It is now absinthe and a quarter," which, being interpreted, meant a quarter past five, the hour at which our lively neighbours take their post-prandial aperitive. Sitting down and forgetting all his troubles and annoyances, he drew from his pocket an immense note-book, containing a large bundle of papers ; he took from this a sheet covered with illegible writing, and stroking his beard with one hand, and bending his head somewhat, he began to recite the poem he had composed that morning. Whilst engaged in this labour of love a gentleman came up to him, pointed to the sheet of paper he was holding, and said, "After you with that volume of Shakespeare, sir." Cardinet responded by a volley of abuse, and it was with great difficulty that his friends could calm him.

"He's an idiot !" cried Cardinet ; "but you are intelligent men ; just listen, and I will read you my new poem, 'Le Vengeur.'"

Ah ! those friends were ardent admirers of poetry, and they at once sat down with their arms on the table, listening intently to the gifted poet reciting his own verses. When he had finished, they nodded their heads, shook hands with him, and exclaimed : "Splendid ! Very fine ! Magnificent !" etc., etc. They then went to dinner, and at ten o'clock the same evening Cardinet entered the Café du Rat-Mort.

In common with most literary cafés of the last few years, the type of the "Rat-Mort" has quite disappeared. The "Rat-Mort" was a café of very dull appearance during the day, and resembled in most respects, the principal café of some provincial town. But at night everything was changed, and the brilliant gas lamps made the faded cushions, dull mirror and tarnished gilding look like new. Each table on the ground floor was occupied by a group of long-haired, long-bearded individuals, budding poets, artists and authors, who made the café ring with their noisy discussions ; they cried, yelled and stamped their feet in support of their artistic theories, and made the glasses and cups dance a lively measure on the marble tables. There came on for discussion the latest sensational article, the newest book, and the last dramatic work, whilst at the further end of the room a group of 'prentice politicians were engaged in overthrowing the

government—theoretically. The politicians looked down on the poets, whilst the poets appeared to ignore even the very presence of these rising statesmen. The room on the first floor was adorned with several specimens of the fair sex ; who, disdaining all discussion, devoted their entire energies to the study of their cards, playing first for the drinks on the table, and then later on for small sums of money. They were quite at home, and drank and even smoked with delightful abandon. It would be an exaggeration to say that there were many *young* ladies there, for they were all what may be termed veterans of the Old Guard, and valiantly sustained the reputation of their gallant corps. Cardinet went in, and after having shaken hands with several friends sitting in the room on the ground floor, he went up to the first floor, and sat down at a table where two ladies were playing cards.

"Ah ! Cardinet ; how are you ?" said one of them ; "we don't often see you now."

"Why, I come nearly every day—it's you we don't see."

"Yes ; I've not been here for a week— That's seven for me— It's my game, my dear girl," said she, taking up the money.

"I've had enough," said her adversary, getting up from the table ; "I have no luck to-day," and she went away to another table.

She who had spoken to Cardinet was no other than Linotte, who now tapped him on the shoulder, and said :

"I've not seen you for a long time ; are you going on all right, my dear poet ?"

"Like a chronometer—but I see you much oftener than you see me."

"Ah ! where have you seen me ?"

"In the Bois."

"What ! do you go to the Bois ?"

"On the boulevard ; I saw you with a gentleman."

"Me !"

"Yes, you !"

"But I am always alone."

"Oh, oh ! What about the baron ?"

"The baron," repeated Linotte, looking intently at Cardinet ; "do you know the baron ?"

"Slightly."

Linotte first blushed, and then turned pale ; she was trying to discover what Cardinet meant by talking to her about the baron.

"But how did you come to know Lorémont ?"

"Ah !" thought Cardinet, "here is one bit of information already. Lorémont !" Then he added aloud. "Oh ! he's an old acquaintance of the Quartier Latin." He was in the habit of thus explaining how he came to know certain people, and usually said he met them in the Quartier Latin. "Yes," he continued, "I knew him there some time ago."

"But Lorémont never lived in the Quartier ; he used to work at a trade."

"I never said he was a student ; but he used to come there."

"Well, I don't congratulate you on your acquaintance."

"That's what I thought when I saw you with him."

"Oh ! it doesn't matter about me, I cannot very well choose my friends, I am well known."

"But wherever did you meet him ?"

"Oh ! I met him a long time ago, to my sorrow."

"Ah! a long time ago."

"Yes, I was only seventeen when I first met him."

"Why, that was in the last century then."

"Here, I say, you might be a little more polite."

"And you loved him?"

"Never."

"He loved you?"

"I don't think so."

"What a strange way you ladies have of weaving little love romances."

"But I never spoke of any love romances."

"It's true— I added—"

"But did he say anything to you about me?" asked Linotte.

"Yes, he has, that is to say."

"But what did he say?" asked Linotte anxiously.

"You know what men say about women, as a rule."

"But what did he say?"

"You know very well what he probably said."

Linotte looked at Cardinet for a minute, but the latter knew what expression to assume in order to meet the circumstances of the case, and sustained Linotte's gaze with the greatest composure. He felt he was on the right track, and that the least thing might reveal to him what he wanted to know. Linotte, on the contrary, appeared to be greatly embarrassed within; if Cardinet, of whom she used to be very fond, knew the baron, the latter could not have failed to speak to him about her past life. She believed this, supposing like all those who do not know how to hold their tongue, that everyone else is like them in that respect. She was obliged to make a great effort to prevent herself from taking Cardinet into her confidence. She felt the want of a friend, being afraid of Lorémont, and desirous of hearing him condemned. Cardinet appeared to have understood this, for he resumed:

"Listen to me, Jeanne, you can do as you like, it's nothing to do with me, you are a nice girl, and I am an old friend of yours; I don't like to see you mixing up with such people."

"What did he say to you?"

Cardinet suddenly remembered the nickname Bérard had revealed to him, and said at haphazard, "He told me all about Linotte." This produced the immediate effect, for she at once got up trembling all over, looked round to see if anyone could hear them, and exclaimed:

"Oh! the wretch! But he didn't tell you what he was himself! He didn't tell you that all this was his fault."

"No," said Cardinet, feeling it was necessary to say something, and yet not understanding what she meant.

"He did not tell you what he is making me do now?"

"What?" asked Cardinet.

Linotte saw she had gone too far, and did not reply. Cardinet, on his side, found that he ran the risk of losing everything by speaking too quick, so he "tried back" by saying:

"I see this man, I know him—and I have never been able to find out what he does."

"Ah! yes," said Linotte, "he is a sharp fellow, and lets no one into his secrets."

"But you know him, and can probably tell what he is doing now."

"What he has always done."

"And what has he always done?"

"Why, made victims."

"But people don't live on victims, they simply prevent others living."

Linotte meditated for a minute, then suddenly becoming maddened, she got up, and exclaimed:

"Ah! he told you he knew me, that I was caught; but that he was not caught, he never is, he gets the others into trouble. Oh! I am suffocating, Cardinet, take me out for a minute."

"Very well, come on!"

Cardinet at once got up, offered his arm to Linotte, and they both went out and took a walk along the outer boulevards. Suddenly, she said:

"But you know him as well, tell me who he is? What does he do? Is he with or against the police?"

Cardinet looked at her in astonishment.

"And you ask me that!"

"But do you know this man?"

"I know him well enough to assure you that he is no good."

Linotte stopped in front of Cardinet and said:

"Answer me frankly, are you his friend, or are you mine?"

"I am your friend, I assure you."

Linotte said no more, but Cardinet felt that she wanted to speak, and remembered that the classic method of making people talk was to give them something to drink. But they had left the café, and it was necessary to find an excuse for going in somewhere else. Cardinet was racking his brain to find some such pretext, when he suddenly perceived the illuminated façade of a public ball. It was the "Jardin de la Boule-Noire." He immediately determined to go in there.

"I say, Jeanne, do you really want to take this walk?"

"I want some fresh air, for I am nearly suffocated."

"Well, if it's air you want, you can have it, but do you want exercise?"

"Not at all—we can sit down if you like."

"On a public seat, what would they take us for. Will you go into the 'Boule Noire,' there we can sit down in a quiet corner and talk over matters, and watch the others dancing. That will remind us of a certain evening at the Casino. Will you come?"

"Oh! yes, if you like."

XI.

CARDINET and Jeanne then went into the "Boule-Noire," and sat down in an arbour opposite the dancers. Pretending that he wanted to make a refreshing drink—a thing that is certainly unknown in France—the poet told the waiter to bring him five or six different sorts of liquors and proceeded to prepare a singular grog. When Cardinet had finished, he was not without feeling a certain anxiety as to drinking it, but strange to say it turned out to be very good! He was convinced that two glasses of it would turn the strongest constitution. It was iced, and Linotte, who felt feverish and thirsty, drank off a glass as soon as Cardinet gave it her. He immediately prepared another glass, and handed it to her, saying:

"It's delicious—if a publican had discovered such a drink he would make a fortune—I shall call that a Cardinet grog."

Having finished brewing his mixture, he took a seat opposite Linotte, chinked glasses with her, and said:

"Come, Jeanne, here we are like two lovers again, you have some trouble on your mind, would you like an old friend's advice?"

Linotte looked at him and said :

"Yes, I really want a candid friend's advice."

"Well, you have only to speak."

"If I speak, you promise to keep everything I say to yourself?"

"Certainly, I am a poet, not a novelist."

"You will help me?"

"In every way I can."

"You will aid me in getting rid of the baron?"

"I swear to you that I will."

"Well, listen—"

"Wait a minute, you must still be thirsty."

"Yes, it's the heat, and besides what you have given me to drink refreshes, but makes one thirsty afterwards."

"But it's good."

"Yes."

"It's a discovery of my own, the Cardinet grog—a fortune. Ah ! if I had been in business what a man I should have been. You see how easy it is to find out how to make a fortune, I am preparing my grog before you, but I hope you will keep my secret—rum, cognac, kirch, curaçoa, and lemon, I only put the water and ice to mix it, now, drink that up and I am ready to listen to you."

Linotte drank up her third glass without the slightest suspicion, whilst Cardinet had not yet finished his first glass.

"I am listening," said he, "tell me first who this baron is, I know him, but only slightly."

"The baron is my bugbear, and he is the man I have always found at my elbow when I was about to do anything wrong. I made his acquaintance when I was only sixteen years old."

"Sixteen years old, about the time of the affair on the Bridge of l'Estacade."

"Oh ! the wretch, he has told you everything."

"Yes," said Cardinet, seeing that his plan was succeeding, for Linotte's eyes were already sparkling, and she was leaning on his shoulder.

"Well, since you appear to know everything—"

Cardinet had to prove he really did know everything, and that the baron had told him all about Linotte, so, remembering what Bérard had told him concerning the crime on the Bridge of l'Estacade, he determined to make the best use of this knowledge.

"Yes, I know all," said he, "you helped to murder a man on the Bridge of l'Estacade, one night in June, under horrible circumstances."

Linotte buried her face in her hands, whilst Cardinet continued in a low voice :—

"The murderer was your lover, you were both arrested, but you were released, as your accomplice declared you to be innocent—they arrested you again, you were tried, and as he again denied your participation in the crime, you were acquitted."

"Yes, I see you know everything. Well, that was when I became acquainted with the baron. He then passed himself off as an Englishman, Lord Eymond ; I was young, and consequently giddy, unable to judge things properly ; this man offered me a fine house and a carriage ; and as I believed him, I accepted. It was only when I got settled in the house,

that is, when it was too late to draw back, that I saw it was a furnished house hired by the month; and that my lord had no other means than what he obtained from the gambling that went on in our house. He had, in fact, placed me in a gambling house, and he was a swindler. One night the police made a raid on the place, Lord Eymond, or rather Lorémont, contrived to escape with all the money that was on the table, but I was arrested and condemned to two years' imprisonment:—

Linotte drank a little of the grog Cardinet, and the latter asked:—

“And you never saw the baron after that?”

“No.”

“But you have seen him lately.”

“Ah! about a fortnight ago.”

“You met him?”

“No.”

“He came to your house?”

“Yes.”

“What! after fifteen years' interval, how did he find you out?”

“How do I know, that's why I want you to protect me against him.”

“What did he want?”

“He came, and seeing me in a miserable state, bought me what I am now wearing, and here I am.”

Cardinet's grog was producing its effect. Linotte who was now very merry, said:—“How thirsty I feel still!” Cardinet saw the danger and put some water in the mixture!

“He gave you all that! and some money as well?”

“Yes, money, and a good deal, first he gave me five hundred francs, then another five hundred, and yesterday, in order to induce me to go again, another three hundred francs!”

“To induce you to go where?”

“Ah! that's it, I cannot tell you that.”

“I presume it is not remorse that is prompting him to come back to you, and give you fourteen or fifteen hundred francs.”

“Oh! no, remorse doesn't trouble him.”

“If you want me to help you, you must not stop half way.”

“Certainly.”

“Why does he give you money? tell me that.”

“No, I won't tell you that.”

“But Jeanne, do tell me!”

“No.”

Linotte buried her face in her hands, and as if to strengthen her resolution, she repeated to herself: “No, I will not tell him that!”

“Well, I will tell you then.”

“You!”

“Yes, I, because I want to extricate you from the painful position you are now in, and which must ultimately ruin you, Jeanne, you must tell me everything you know about this man, you must give me all details, what I know is known to others, speak, and I will save you from him.”

“You say that to frighten me, but you know nothing.”

Cardinet drew Linotte towards him, looked round to make certain no one was listening, and whispered in her ear.

“This man came to you and said: ‘I have found Bérard, your accomplice, he is rich, and at large, if you like to help me, we can make him pay us blackmail.’”

Linotte drew back terrified, and seizing Cardinet's hands, she said in a hoarse whisper :—

"Yes, you know all, it's true, oh ! say no more !"

Cardinet made her sit down beside him.

"Now answer me, what I have told you is true ?"

"Yes."

"And what are this man's means of existence ?"

"I don't know."

"Jeanne, I shall abandon you if you are not frank."

"I assure you I don't know, I have often heard he belonged to the police, I really think he's a bookmaker."

"Where does he live ?"

"Rue Duphot, at the corner of the Boulevard."

"When are you to see him again ?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Where ?"

"At my house."

"Listen, Linotte, it is too late to draw back now, I know everything, moreover I am a friend of Bérard's."

"Whatever are you saying ?"

"The truth, Bérard and his family are protected from your manœuvres; they went away at two o'clock, and are going to spend a month abroad."

"Abroad ?"

"Yes, abroad. If you like to hold your tongue, I have full power to treat with you, but you will have to leave Paris."

"Never !"

"What do you want to do ?"

Linotte looked at him intently for a minute ; Cardinet had a threatening look, whilst she was smiling. She placed her hands on his shoulders and said :—

"What do I want to do ? I want to help you to save him !"

"Really !"

"And I will ask but one thing from him, and one thing from you, I want him to accord me an hour of his society and a kiss, and you to rid me of this Lorémont."

"And is this really true ?"

"Yes."

"But whence this sudden change ?"

"I saw him this morning."

"Ah !"

"But he didn't see me, and I had a strange feeling, I still love him, I feel giddy."

"Very good, it's a bargain—I shall not leave you till to-morrow."

"Why ?"

"Because the baron is coming to your house to-morrow morning, and I want to be there when he arrives."

"But if he sees you he will say nothing."

"But he will not see me, you will conceal me somewhere, and I will direct your movements. I forgot to tell you that Bérard not being in Paris, I can do as I like. If I went to the Commissary of Police, and told him about your manœuvres and those of the baron, he would send you back you know where."

"Ah! Cardinet, you say that to frighten me; you are afraid I am deceiving you."

"No, I am not frightened, but I am on my guard."

"If you like we will go and have supper and not go home till early in the morning."

"All right, we will go and have supper. It's understood."

"And you still suspect me?" said Linotte, getting up, but she needed Cardinet's assistance, for she had become merrier than ever since the transformation that had taken place in her ideas, and she said—"Ah! but it's very strange, I feel almost tipsy, and yet you suspect me still, notwithstanding the old saying:—*In vino veritas*."

"Oh! oh! you speak Latin! but it's not wine you have been drinking, it's Cardinet grog."

The poet gave Linotte his arm, and before leaving the ball-room, they stopped to look at some people dancing a quadrille, which seemed to be attracting great attention. "Why!" said he "it's Bérard's servant!" and on looking a second time he saw a young man dancing the cancan with Petite. He then heard some of the regular frequenters of the ball-room say:—"It's Lalongueur, dancing." "Ah! Ah!" thought Cardinet when they went out. "Lalongueur, 84 Route d'Argenteuil, he's with Petite; to-day, Jeanne, to-morrow morning the baron, and to-morrow evening, Lalongueur—I shall then be able to write to Bérard."

Cardinet helped Linotte into the cab, got in himself, and told the man to drive to the Restaurant Brébant. He was a thorough-going Parisian, and liked to stay up late, and even not to go to bed at all; he was often idle, and without seeking amusement would leave the "Rat-Mort," go and spend an hour at the Café des Variétés, a part of the night at Brébant's, the other part at the Helder, and then he would go and wait for the early morning at Bordier's. When he had invited Linotte to go to supper and wait for the morning, he had not changed his style of living, but had merely done what he had often done before. Linotte hardly ever went out to supper since she had met Lorémont. Feeling very merry, first from what she had taken to drink, and then from the honest determination she had come to, she was delighted to indulge in this innocent little escapade with her friend Cardinet. They sat down to supper. Feeling quite at home with her poet, as she called him, and determined to assist him in the work he had undertaken, Linotte gave him the fullest details about what had been done with the baron. The anonymous letter which had been sent to Lorémont greatly perplexed Cardinet, and he got Linotte to dictate to him as near as possible the contents of it. Who were these friends of this man who took such a great interest in Bérard? it would appear that others besides themselves were acquainted with the terrible secret. When the grey morning light pierced through the curtains, Cardinet took Linotte to her house, and as Bélida was asleep, he was able to go up without being seen. At nine o'clock Lorémont was to come and call on his accomplice; about half-past eight Cardinet concealed himself in a cupboard where Linotte hung her dresses, and, leaving the door open, he patiently waited. At nine o'clock there was a knock, Linotte went to open the door and Cardinet hid himself behind the dresses. It was a commissionaire with a letter.

"Is there a reply?" asked Linotte.

"No, madame."

The commissionaire went away, Linotte opened the letter, and called

out to Cardinet—"You can come out, he will not be here to-day. Read that." Cardinet came out from his hiding-place, took the letter and read as follows :—"Through you we are now obliged to wait, whilst if you had listened to me, the affair would have been finished two days ago. He went away yesterday with his family, and will not be back for a fortnight. I shall spend this time in the country, and the day of his return call on you --we shall then have to settle the business." The letter was not signed.

"Well?" said Linotte.

"Well, he is kept well posted up, and must have some one in the house --however we have a fortnight before us, and that's something, between this and then I shall have to find a way of replying to this fellow--in any case we will go to the Rue Duphot together, and you will go and ask the door-keeper when he went away and when he is coming back."

"Let's go at once, for I am almost exhausted."

"That's the last thing I shall ask you to do to-day, and you will be free as soon as you have done it."

They went downstairs, and walked arm-in-arm to the Place de la Madeleine, Cardinet waiting for Linotte whilst she went to make enquiries of the doorkeeper.

"Baron Lormond, please?"

"Monsieur the baron has gone into the country, madame."

"Into the country!--but he paid no farewell visits."

"In consequence of a letter he received he was obliged to go away very suddenly."

"But when did he leave?"

"Three days ago."

"And when is he coming back?"

"He didn't say, madame."

"But where can I write to him?"

"Here, madame."

"He has requested you to forward his letters?"

"No, madame, they are called for every other day."

"Ah!"

"Would you leave your card, madame?"

"Yes," said Jeanne, feeling in her pocket for her card case, and giving the door-keeper a card.

"And have you no message to leave, madame?"

"Nothing--this is only a formal visit."

"Very good, madame."

Linotte then rejoined Cardinet.

"Well?" said he.

"Well, he went into the country three days ago, without leaving word when he would be back; he has his letters fetched every other day."

"Every other day; that means he is not far from Paris, if we want his address we can get it," said Cardinet, hailing a passing cab.

"What are you doing?"

"I am taking a cab to set you down at your door, after which I am going to pay an important visit."

They got into the cab, and after having put Linotte down at her door, Cardinet gave the coachman another address which made him pull a very long face. An hour later, the cab stopped opposite No. 84, Route d'Argenteuil. The house seemed to be uninhabited, but, as soon as he knocked, Cardinet could hear two dogs barking in the yard. The door opened, and

revealed our old friends Grosbouléau, Lalongueur, and Petite, who had all three come to receive the visitor—behind the three worthies were the two dogs Cardinet had heard barking, two frightful bull dogs, with very little ear or tail, but a good deal of face, mouth and fang.

“Monsieur Lalongueur?” said Cardinet.

“That’s my name,” replied Lalongueur, “what can I do for you?”

“Ah!” said Petite all at once, recognizing Cardinet whom she had seen the previous day.

“What’s the matter?” growled the members of the firm of Lalongueur, Grosbouléau and Co.

“It’s M. Bérard’s friend.”

On hearing the name, the two partners looked rather awkward, and even anxious, but they ultimately invited Cardinet into the house. When he had been introduced into an immense room, which was sumptuously furnished with one marble table and four stools, Grosbouléau offered the visitor a seat and said:—

“May I inquire the motive of your visit, sir?”

“Well, gentlemen, I have a great deal to say to you; if you will kindly sit down, we will talk matters over.”

“Would you like some slight refreshment?” asked Lalongueur.

“With pleasure,” replied Cardinet, in order to put them thoroughly at their ease.

By Grosbouléau’s orders, Petite placed three glasses and a bottle of wine on the table. Having touched glasses and drunk to one another’s health, the two partners sat down and gazed at their visitor, anxiously waiting for him to speak.

“This is the affair,” commenced Cardinet. “You evidently know me, for madame just now said ‘It’s M. Bérard’s friend—’ I am in fact a very intimate friend of his.”

“Yes, sir,” said the two men, in the same breath.

Whilst coming along, Cardinet had thought of the means to be employed to obtain information about the baron from Lalongueur. In spite of himself he could not help thinking of the two phrases, the first heard by Bérard when he was concealed in his shop and probably pronounced by Lalongueur:—“Did he say anything before you about the affair of the Grande-Jatte?” and the other, taken from the letter written to the baron and which Jeanne had dictated to Cardinet:—“We will prove that it was you who were at the head of the affair of the Ile de la Grande-Jatte.”

XII.

“THESE two phrases,” said Cardinet to himself, “are the two keys by which I shall discover everything.” Leaning his arms on the table and looking intently first at Lalongueur and then at Grosbouléau, putting them quite out of countenance, he said:—

“I will not beat about the bush, gentlemen, and may as well tell you that I come to ask you for some information about a man.”

“A man!” exclaimed the two men.

“Baron de Lormond.”

Grosbouléau looked at Lalongueur. Cardinet saw it would be best to make a bold plunge, so looking straight at the two men he said:—“You were both engaged in the affair of the Grande-Jatte so”—Grosbouléau at

once got up, and Lalongueur did the same ; seeing his friend was making for the door he jumped over the table and rejoined him. Grosbouleau whispered :—" We are caught—it's a detective—that blackguard has 'peached' on us." Cardinet saw he had succeeded, and at once said :—

"No, I am not a detective, I am simply a friend come to warn you and ask you for something in exchange."

The two men looked at each other, and by a tacit understanding resumed their seats.

"Well, sir, I don't know who you are," said Grosbouleau, whilst Lalongueur was wagging his head as a sign that he approved of his friend's speech, "I see you know all about the affair, which has been related to you in the wrong way. We are two honest men, sir, and thought Lormond was the same ! he passed himself off as a baron !—we are honest working men, and he came to Lalongueur and myself—"

"Grosbouleau and myself—" said Lalongueur by way of confirming what his friend was saying.

"To tell us he was going to move his furniture from the Ile de la Grande-Jatte, and to ask us to do the job. We said 'yes,' and arranged to do it for twenty francs. Is that true, Lalongueur ?"

"It's true, I stake my word on it."

"We moved everything out, and in the evening asked where the things were to be taken to. 'That's no business of yours,' said he, paying us our twenty francs. We are simply labourers, they pay us our wages, and we know nothing further. But when I got home I said to Lalongueur :—" 'You'll see, we shall get into trouble about this, that man doesn't seem to me to be on the square.'"

"As true as that's a bottle of wine, my mate said exactly what he has just repeated," said Lalongueur.

"And you see," continued Grosbouleau, turning to Lalongueur, "we shall certainly be annoyed by this affair—Here's this gentleman come to—"

"Ah ! good heavens ! what a lot of disgusting scoundrels there are in this world !" groaned Lalongueur.

"Pray explain, sir, and if it is possible to atone for the harm we have involuntarily done, we are ready to do so."

"Yes, sir, we are quite ready !" chimed in Lalongueur.

Cardinet was delighted, for he was now thoroughly acquainted with these two knaves, and, pretending to be their dupe, he said :—

"Well gentlemen, I have come to tell you that there is a scoundrel at large who must be improved off the face of the earth, that scoundrel is the Baron de Lormond,—alias Hippolyte Lorémont, and I ask you for your assistance."

"And is that what you wanted ?" said the two burglars, joyously ; "yer 'and, guv'nor, yer 'and !"

And they both stretched out their brawny fists towards Cardinet, who was obliged to shake hands with them.

"Honest people soon understand one another."

"That's what I was thinking," said Cardinet smiling.

"Petite, lay four covers," cried out Grosbouleau, then turning to Cardinet he said, "You'll breakfast with us, won't you ?"

"Ah ! gentlemen, I—"

"Come, no ceremony," said Lalongueur.

"Well, I accept, and we will talk the matter over whilst getting our

breakfast," said Cardinet, who thought to himself, "I am certainly in a thieves' tavern, but being in Rome, I must do as the Romans do."

Petite prepared the breakfast and they soon commenced ; Cardinet was too well aware what excellent result he had obtained from a bottle of wine the previous night not to employ the same means in the present case. He observed that Grosbouleau was fond of talking and thought to himself :—

"He'll keep the conversation going whilst I pour out the wine." He then requested permission to stand a bottle or two of wine, and they accepted with alacrity. Petite went to a neighbouring tavern and fetched it. Whilst Cardinet was filling the glasses, Grosbouleau whispered to his chum—"He's a proper sort of a chap, he'll help us to get rid of the baron!" "Yes, that's what I was thinking." They drank, and Grosbouleau's tongue was let loose, but no wine was necessary for that, for he had such a longing to hear himself talk, that he was obliged to satisfy it, if only by talking a lot of nonsense. Cardinet soon saw this, and in order to come to serious business as soon as possible, he commenced at once, by giving Grosbouleau a chance of airing his eloquence. He remarked to Grosbouleau :—

"Are you fond of boating?"

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Your costume!"

"Ah! you've guessed right—I am a boating man, and a real one I can tell you."

"What a strange amusement!"

"Oh! you mustn't joke about boating men—in the first place they must be divided into three classes."

"How is that, three classes?"

"Certainly."

"Ah! you must explain that to me," said Cardinet, really meaning—"Talk away, whilst I am filling your glass I can make up my mind what to ask you." Grosbouleau wiped his mouth on the back of his hand before commencing his lecture. Lalongueur, seeing that his friend was about to hold forth, drew up attentively, and opened his ears in order to catch every word of the precious discourse. Petite, more prudent than the rest, pretended she had some housework to do, and ran away to the kitchen. Grosbouleau then launched forth into a long speech about boating, dividing the boating men into three classes, and describing with the greatest minuteness the difference that existed between them. When he had finished, Cardinet said to him :—

"Well, what class do you belong to?"

"Why, the first, the serious ones."

"And do you receive burglars in your house?" asked Cardinet, smiling.

Petite, who was pouring out the coffee, dropped the pot in dismay. Lalongueur sprang up like a jack-in-the-box. Grosbouleau, white as a sheet, pushed his chair back.

"Burglars!" exclaimed the three confederates, all at the same time.

"The fact is," said Cardinet, "I have just observed a table service here belonging to my friend Bérard."

The three were about to protest, when Cardinet motioned them to sit down again. Pointing to the window, he said :

"At the slightest word I will have you arrested, I have help outside. Be obliging, and we can come to an understanding. You are a pair of

burglars, but I want your assistance. Let us talk the matter over seriously."

They said nothing further, but all resumed their seats. Cardinet had at length guessed everything. The men he had before him were professional burglars, and that explained Lorémont's mysterious existence; he was the leader of the gang. In order to proceed with certainty, it was now necessary to procure precise information, and he commenced by saying:

"You are the men who committed the robbery on the Ile de la Grande-Jatte. I know it. What part did the baron play in that affair?"

"But," said Grosbouleau, "I have already told you, he engaged us to effect the removal."

"It was he who directed the affair?"

"Certainly, being the landlord."

"Sir," said Cardinet, interrupting him, "my carriage is waiting at the door, and I have not come alone. At a given signal a man will come in here, and he is really a detective. If you continue to answer me in this way, I shall give the signal, and you will be subjected to this man's examination."

"Come, come, sir," said Grosbouleau with an engaging air, "you won't do that."

"No, you really wouldn't think of doing that," said the irrepressible Lalongueur, pouring a little cognac into Cardinet's cup, after having filled his own.

"No, not if you are frank, and try to help me."

"Come, come, don't get angry, I shall be only too pleased to come to an understanding. What do you want of us?"

"The truth!"

"Well, go on, I am as frank as a man can possibly be in this world."

"Well, I'll first put you quite at your ease. Be frank, answer my questions simply, and I swear to you on my word of honour, that you have nothing to fear from me; on the contrary, I will help you against the baron."

"Very good, it's understood, but pray go on."

"What do you want us to say, we are quite ready," said Lalongueur.

"Monsieur Grosbouleau, you and Lalongueur belong to a gang of thieves."

"Excuse me, not thieves! removers!"

"Removers!"

"Yes, sir, a thief is a man who deprives his fellow-creatures of necessary articles, we only take superfluities."

"I don't understand," said Cardinet.

"It's quite simple, I should be quite incapable of going into a man's house and robbing him of things he wants for everyday use."

"Quite incapable!" groaned Lalongueur.

"We go into some country house—a place people visit occasionally, but which they could very well do without—and not only that, we are simply workmen, we don't remove things on our own account."

"Remove things, I think you said."

"Yes, we *remove* any unconsidered trifle we see lying about in the way."

"In short, you don't steal, you don't remove on your own account."

"Oh! no," exclaimed Grosbouleau.

"Certainly not!" echoed Lalongueur, indignant at such a supposition.

"Sir," said Grosboubleau, "these things are in the blood, I might commit a foolish act, but a base one, never! no, never! Ah! unfortunately, I cannot choose my employers; I don't say to them: 'Is it a straight business?' I don't do that, and admit I may be very wrong not to do it."

"Yes, we are wrong, very wrong!" said Grosboubleau's echo.

"I am a remover," continued the latter, "and like to dawdle along the banks of the Seine. If a man comes up to me and says: 'Remove what there is in that house,' I remove forthwith, but I don't steal. I religiously hand over to the man who engages me the articles I was requested to remove; if there is any robbery in that, the man who directs me is the robber, not me."

"We don't steal!" vociferated Lalongueur.

"But really it's quite true," said Cardinet, laughing, "you are two very honest men. And who accused you of stealing?"

"He, the wretch! the scoundrel! the blackguard! the brigand!"

"Are you talking about the baron?"

"Yes, sir."

"The traitor who sold us."

"How did he sell you?"

"Why, for you to be here, he must have given you our address."

"But no one—"

"Ah! you don't like to own it. But he has deceived you, I swear it, he has represented us to be what we are not."

Cardinet was greatly amused by the modesty of the two knaves, but immediately returning to what interested him, he asked:

"Why was this lady at Bérard's house?"

"You want to know all. Well, the reason is this: For the last two years we have been working for Lormond, and during that time we have been robbed shamefully. The day we did the job at the Ile de la Grande-Jatte, we arranged, Petite, Lalongueur and myself—"

"Petite!" queried Cardinet.

"Petite, that's my sweetheart, the lady you see here."

"Ah! good, she belonged to the gang, or rather to the company of 'Removers.'"

"Exactly."

"Well?"

"Well, seeing that we were being robbed every day, we determined to set up business for ourselves."

"A business, what business?"

"Why, a business—a business—you understand what I mean, the sale, purchase and exchange of goods proceeding from public auctions."

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"That day we were at work, when I noticed the baron take a portrait from the chimney-piece and look at it."

"Off Bérard's chimney-piece?"

"Yes; and he said: 'But I know that face. I fancy I've seen him before!' He then asked us the name of the proprietor of the house, and I told him, for it was I who had collected the information."

"How, the information?"

"Yes, when we have a job in view, we get as much information as possible about the place, because we only do tip-top work! If we hear they are workmen or rather poor people, we throw it up—there's nothing to be

done with the broken furniture from furnished lodgings, the odd china articles, &c. &c., which people think quite good enough for the country ! But if it turns out that it is a rich man, with a house well furnished with linen, silver, mirrors, china, &c. &c., why then we—"

"Yes, I understand. And Bérard's was a house of the latter description."

"Just so, so I said, it's a man called Bérard, a commission merchant, Rue d'Enghien. 'Bérard, Bérard,' he repeated, 'but I know that name !' He meditated a moment, then suddenly struck his forehead and said : 'But it isn't possible, I'll go and see about that !' But I didn't like to hear him say that. I therefore warned Lalongueur, and said to myself : 'He has guessed we are going to leave him, and wants to play us some trick.' And, in effect, I learnt two days later that he was going to send some one to Bérard's house."

"Who did you hear that from ?"

Again Grosbouleau hesitated before replying.

"So you refuse to tell me ?"

"No, no, at our—our sleeping partner's—"

"Ah ! very good, and how did he know it ?"

"The baron had been to ask him for information about Bérard. So said I to myself, 'We must know why he is sending there.' We at once decided to send Petite there as a servant, she went to Bérard's fruiterers, and they told her that very likely there might be a vacancy for a servant in his house, she went, and got engaged at once. That's the whole affair."

"So she was watching Bérard ?"

"Not a bit of it, the baron !"

"But he never came there !"

"He came once with a lady, but stopped in the carriage whilst she went in."

"Really, but he doesn't go now."

"No, on account of a letter we wrote him."

"Ah ! that letter came from you—that explains everything."

"What ! you've seen our letter ?"

"No, but I know what it contained."

And Cardinet opened his pocket-book and read the letter Linotte had dictated to him. The three thieves were thunderstruck. Cardinet put the letter back and began thinking as to what he should do. He felt quite reassured about the three individuals he was now cross-examining, and was convinced they were quite ignorant of the plot being laid by the baron. There were only three people who knew Bérard's secret ; himself, Linotte, and Lorémont. By the aid of the three knaves he was now with, he felt certain of getting the better of the baron. He could see they hated him as much as he did himself, and understood that it was necessary to explain why he was pursuing the baron. After a few minutes' silence, Cardinet said :

"Well, this is it, the woman who was with the baron refused to serve his projects, which consisted in delivering you up to justice, by inventing a different story about the robbery on the Ile de la Grande-Jatte."

"I suspected as much," said Grosbouleau.

"That's the thanks you get after working for people."

"Now he is pursuing this woman with his hatred, and I am anxious to save her, for I am very fond of her. I have therefore come to ask you to help me, and provide me with weapons against Lorémont."

"We have plenty, and will help you with pleasure."

"But the labourer is worthy of his hire," added the practical Lalongneur.

"You shall be well paid," said Cardinet.

"All right, we are at your service—Petite, another bottle."

"Now let us talk over the matter seriously," said Cardinet, explaining to the two burglars the plan which was to ruin Lorémont and save Bérard.

XIII.

A FEW days after the scenes we have just related, the Baron de Lormond, dressed in a country costume, that is to say, a drill jacket, white trousers, and low shoes, with a linen cap, was walking along the broad alley at the entrance to the Forest of Saint-Germain. With the aromatic air of the wood, he inhaled the perfume of a splendid cigar. He frequently looked at his watch, and occasionally stamped his feet in a manner which indicated that he could hardly restrain his impatience. Three or four times he murmured; "She will certainly not come to-day." All at once he looked along the alley and exclaimed joyously: "Ah! there she is at last!" And, in fact, along the road leading from the town, a young woman could be seen making her way towards the baron. She appeared to be about eighteen, and though fashionably dressed, looked more like a work girl dressed in her Sunday clothes than anything else. She had a pretty face, pale complexion, bright eyes, red lips, white teeth, delicate ears and a superb forehead—the whole surmounted by a splendid head of hair. The baron went forward to meet her and said:

"Ah! here you are at last!"

"Ah!" said she, "if you only knew what trouble I had, I thought I should not be able to get away—and that he suspected something."

"Oh! pray be careful!"

"I am, very—but I am an hour late."

"Take my arm and we will talk as we walk along."

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" asked the young woman.

"Certainly, my darling!" said the baron, suiting the action to the word. She kissed him in return, then, taking his face in her two hands, and gazing at him lovingly, she again kissed him, and said with a sigh:

"Ah! how I love you, darling; when will you love me as I do you?"

"Soon," said the baron, hiding his impatience. She then took his arm again, and taking a narrow pathway, they plunged into the heart of the forest.

"What fresh news have you?" he asked.

"You got my letter?"

"Yes. You told me you were going to leave the house, and that he was going to the seaside, to Roscoff."

"That's it."

"And since then?"

"Oh! a great many things—were it not for me, you would be ruined."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that a friend of M. Bérard's has got his eye on you."

"A friend of Bérard's?"

"Yes, a certain M. Cardinet."

"Cardinet! I don't know that name."

"Neither do I. I only saw him once at Bérard's house."

"What was he doing there?"

"He came to take Bérard's place whilst he was away."

"But how is it he has got his eye on me; he doesn't know me."

"Oh! yes he does."

"But it's impossible. They may know Linotte."

"Ah! Ah! Linotte—the woman you love!"

"Not at all!"

"Oh! yes you do, but never mind, she is avenging me."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that Linotte is with Cardinet. They are two old friends."

"You must be mad."

"Not at all, except it is after you," said the young girl, leaning lovingly on Lorémont's arm and gazing into his face with a passionate expression. The latter, fully absorbed by what she had just said, did not notice this, and continued:

"So you think Linotte is deceiving me?"

"Of course, you dear old simpleton, just listen. Linotte only took up with you because she was in the greatest poverty; at the bottom of her heart the only pure sentiment she ever felt was her love for Bérard. When you went to her and spoke of an affair against him, she at first refused, then she perceived the possibility of again meeting the man she formerly loved. For this though it might be a moment of suffering, she accepted. You, like a ninny, thought she was doing it for money, and that it was this which made her change her mind. How simple you are! Don't you know that women like ourselves dote on forbidden fruit—she knows she can never be anything to this man and yet she loves him—she knows he would never treat her with anything but scorn, and yet she cannot help loving him. She loves him in spite of everything, she was the cause of his misfortunes formerly, and would like to atone for her wrongs now, that is to say she appears to have joined you in your plans to ruin him whilst in reality she is doing all in her power to save him."

"But what are you saying?" said the baron, anxiously. "What makes you suppose that?"

"Why, I put myself in her place, and that's the best way of forming a correct opinion."

"And—"

"And—you dispose of me, I love you—though you always repulse me, I am always at your feet—though you are sure to ruin me, I am sacrificing myself to save you, I am betraying a man who loves me, for you, who do not care in the least for me."

"But what you say about Linotte is mere supposition."

"There's no blinder man than he who won't see."

"Well, give me facts."

"Listen: Cardinet came to our house yesterday, and informed us that Linotte had told him everything."

"You are quite sure?"

"The very morning you were to go to her house, he was there concealed in a cupboard."

"But it's impossible."

"Yesterday he asked Grosbouleau and Lalongueur who you were, and what you did. You can guess what they replied. To-day he has doubtless been to the Prefecture, and you will be wanted."

For a moment Lorémont was terrified, but recovering himself, and, ready to meet any danger, he said:

"You are quite sure of what you are saying?"

"Don't I tell you he came to Argenteuil yesterday."

"Who?"

"Why, this Cardinet, he breakfasted with them, and I waited at table—Grosbouleau accepted his offers, and you are to be delivered up five days hence."

"Five days, I shall have time to thwart all their plans, or to make them yield."

"Ah! you always think you have got to deal with a lot of stupid people."

"What do you mean?"

"Bérard is no longer here."

"He is at the seaside—he is coming back."

"Cardinet said yesterday that he was going to set up business abroad, and that M. Nither, his predecessor, would carry on the business in Paris."

"What's that you're saying?"

"They suspected what you were doing, and have taken steps accordingly."

"But it's impossible. Would a man like Bérard sacrifice a position which protects him from the past—it's impossible!"

"But it is so."

Lorémont released his arm and wiped his brow. They walked on for some time in silence, and the unfortunate wretch was visibly anxious; all his plans were being thwarted, he was denounced, placed under a fresh accusation, they would be searching for him with greater activity than ever. Having sacrificed his last bank-notes for the organisation of the affair, he had no more money. Since the departure of Grosbouleau and Lalongueur, the gang of burglars had dispersed; he had no further resources, and was counting on the success of the Bérard affair, and now not only was this snatched from his hands, but he was moreover obliged to hide himself from those who would shortly be in pursuit of him. Suddenly stopping short, he buried his face in his hands, and said:

"Come, explain how the case stands, tell me all the facts."

"But I have told you all the facts."

"No, tell me what you saw, and what you have done, Petite."

For as the reader will have guessed, it was Petite—Grosbouleau's and Lalongueur's partner! Petite took Lorémont's arm, leant heavily on it, hung her head on his shoulder, and said in a low, soft voice:

"When I told you Grosbouleau and Lalongueur had taken away for themselves a part of the goods from the Ile de la Grand-Jatte, you replied that you would leave them alone, as it would be the means of getting rid of them, for they would be in your way during the affair you were about to engage in. They took the articles and sold them, and it is they who will be blamed for the robbery. You made me stay with them, when you found out they wanted to send me into Bérard's house. I must admit I do not understand your reason for doing this, you want to levy blackmail on Bérard, and yet you will not tell me the motive, I fancy there must be a child in the case, and that Linotte is mixed up in it as well. However, as you say, that's no business of mine. Now I was watching you to find out for them what you were doing in the house, and I was watching them for you. I have already told you about Linotte's fruitless visits, what Bérard was doing, the family quarrel about young Fontaine."

"You've told me all that."

"And you even told me you quite understood why he would not go and claim his brother-in-law at the Prefecture."

"Yes, yes," said Lorémont, getting impatient, "and what else?"

"The same day Linotte and he met at his door."

"Did they speak?"

"No. They saw each other."

"I didn't know that."

"Neither did I until the evening. When the family left the house to go to the railway station, I did not lose sight of Cardinet; having heard what Bérard had recommended him to do, I guessed the importance of the affair, and in the evening I went into the ball-room of the 'Boule Noire,' almost behind him."

"What was he doing there?"

"He was with Linotte, and, having concealed myself behind the arbour in which they were sitting I heard a part of their conversation, and that's how I learnt what they were doing to you. The next day I was coming to tell you all that, only waiting for my two idiots to leave the house, when Cardinet arrived, he knew all, even to the affair of the Grande-Jatte, of which I myself was ignorant; with a few glasses of wine and a little money, he persuaded the two imbeciles to help him against you, of whom they are mortally afraid."

"But what is their plan?"

"Their plan! that's what I don't know."

Lorémont looked at Petite with a scowl, and kept his eyes on her for some minutes, trying to read in her eyes what was going on in her mind, afraid of being duped by his accomplice. Petite worshipped Lorémont, but he had only felt a passing regard for her. He had made her acquaintance through Grosboubleau, and had made her stay with this latter, on whom she had acted as a spy for him. Grosboubleau and Lalongueur had not premeditated their separation. Petite was therefore unaware of it, and had only heard about it the day it became an accomplished fact, and had therefore been quite unable to warn her real master, Lorémont. This strange passion for the scoundrel seemed to be nurtured and to strengthen on what ought really to have killed it. Lorémont despised and repulsed her, and simply made use of her for his nefarious schemes. This lukewarmness, this indifference simply increased the affection she felt for him; Lorémont was of opinion that she deceived everyone. Whilst Grosboubleau and Lalongueur imagined she was their partner, she was really their enemy, and had at once informed Lorémont of the plot they were hatching against him. The latter, whose idea of wealth had completely changed since his eyes had fallen on Bérard's portrait, at the Ile de la Grande-Jatte, was delighted at the dispersal of his gang of burglars, brought about by the desertion of Lalongueur and Grosboubleau. Lorémont had certainly felt anxious when he heard of the watch they had set on him at Bérard's house, but had been promptly reassured by Petite telling him the motive of this supervision; the letter, which had at first frightened him, was explained the next day. Petite worshipped this scoundrel, and a smile, a kiss from him repaid her for all her troubles. But Lorémont, who knew how little he could count on the devotion of this woman who loved him, was suspicious. On hearing the reply she had just made him, he repeated in a hard voice:

"Petite, will you or will you not tell me their plan?"

"But I cannot."

"Why?"

"Because I don't know what it is."

"You know everything they do."

"Yes, as a rule, but this Cardinet insisted on my being sent away, whilst he was explaining his plan to them."

"But didn't you question them afterwards?"

"Yes, but could not ascertain anything."

"But it's impossible."

"Hippolyte, I swear it's true."

"You swear you know nothing?"

"But if I knew, I should tell you."

"You might deceive me!"

"Deceive you! you must be mad!"

"But it's astonishing that Grosbouleau should keep anything from you."

"He absolutely refused to tell me anything."

"It's a very singular thing," said Lorémont, shaking his head.

"But just think for a moment," said Petite, taking his hands in hers and looking him straight in the face, "what am I doing here? I have come to tell you to look to yourself, that you are lost, and that you are 'wanted' by the police. If I knew what means they are going to employ, do you not think I would tell you? Would you like me to give you a proof that I am on your side?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you like, I will stay with you."

"And never go back?" said Lorémont, meditating for a moment.

"Well," continued he, "not seeing you come back, they will be anxious for their own safety, and will pay no further attention to me. I accept."

"You accept?" said Petite, her face beaming with joy.

"Yes."

"Oh! how I love you, darling!" exclaimed the delighted Petite, throwing her arms round his neck, and covering his face with kisses.

Lorémont was thinking to himself, "I must first get out of this trouble, Bérard's affair is lost, at least for the present, we must look for something else at once. Petite will be useful to me."

"Come, what are we going to do?" said she.

"In the first place, we are going to dinner."

"Yes, and whilst at dinner we can settle on a plan."

"That's it."

"Let's go to your hotel, I want to get rid of all this, it's a fine day, we will dine at the guardian's house, I want to be at my ease."

They returned by the grand alley, and soon found themselves within sight of the hotel. Lorémont said to his companion:

"Go up to my room, I need not go up with you, take off your mantle and hat, I will wait for you here, meanwhile I will think over what you have told me."

"That's it, I will run in and come back at once."

She ran off towards the hotel, and Lorémont left alone, walked along slowly, with his head down, saying to himself: "I have been a fool, I ought to have done the job alone; and to have gone to this man and said, 'I know certain things—give me a hundred thousand francs and I will say nothing, if not, in two hours' time, the Commissary of Police will be informed of your presence in Paris, and your wife will know what sort of a man she has married.' It is quite evident this would have frightened him,

and that he would have given me what I wanted, the affair would have been completed in a day, and I should have been protected in every way. However, it's no use reverting to the past. I am now in a difficult position, and must contrive to get out of it somehow; the first thing to do is to get away from here; and yet who knows I am here? No one. I gain a few days' quietude by keeping Petite here, the two knaves will be frightened at her absence and will forget all about me and look to their own personal safety. To-morrow I will send Petite to Paris, she is clever, and will easily ascertain what has been the result of the raid made on Lelia d'Equermoise's house. I will send her to Madame Chaineau's, who is tormenting Linotte, and find out how the affair could be managed. She will ascertain on the spot if Bérard has really re-transferred the business to Nither, and where Bérard is going to set up again. I will go away, for I want a change."

All at once Lorémont, hearing a cry, turned round. He saw that the window of his bedroom was open, and heard Petite crying out in excited tones: "Run away! run away!" He understood they were watching for him to return to arrest him, and it was Petite warning and saving him. The hotel door was already open, and the detectives were coming out; there was no time to lose, and Lorémont quickly made up his mind; walking quietly to the end of the street, he took a turn and ran as fast as he could towards the forest. Twenty minutes later, he stopped, quite out of breath; sitting down on the grass and wiping his forehead, he said to himself: "I've had a narrow escape." Crouching down, with his face buried in his hands, Lorémont tried to calm his troubled brain. He had to fly, and his legs refused to carry him, he wanted to think, and his brain was in a whirl; should he run away? he must live, and his pockets were empty. In Saint-Germain as in Paris, he was hunted down like a wild beast. The time had arrived when society, tired of his crimes, was about to call him to account, and when his dupes and victims were about to claim reparation for all they had suffered at his hands. Summer was drawing to a close, and the evening breeze foretold the approach of winter, the weather, which had been very fine during the day, was now becoming gloomy, like the thoughts of this hardened wretch, a grey mist was enveloping the whole forest, and the man's brain was becoming cloudy. The sharp cold wind was whistling in the trees, depriving them of their leaves, which fell down, yellow and dead, on the short and stumpy grass. It was getting dark, night was stealing over the forest. All nature was enveloped in gloom, like the soul of the miserable man! His eyes sparkled with a strange light, his mouth was full of froth, his teeth grated, and his dry lips were parched with fever. At the slightest noise, he got up and ran into the wood, thinking he could see, at every step he took, the well-known uniform of a gendarme. He ran on like this for some considerable time, then, thoroughly exhausted by this race, during which the branches of the trees had struck and wounded his forehead, he stopped, and began to soliloquise:

"Now, I am engaged in a stupendous struggle; just when I thought my future was assured, and I was about to become a respectable citizen, you want to crush me. Oh! but no, I live and will live. The only time I ever wished to be good, you want to punish me, and you say: 'You have done this and that.' But what does that matter to you? The end justifies the means! I want to become honest again, and you want to prevent me doing so. But take care, I have always lived by evil-doing, and shall not change. I have lived, and still live by it, or will die in the

attempt. Ah! ah! Monsieur the murderer of the Bridge of l'Estacade, you have conquered me!" Lorémont, very feverish, unable to fix his thoughts for long, attributed what was now happening to him to the counter-action—directed by the man he was attacking—and all his hatred fell on Bérard; quite mad, unable to discern anything, his soul full of hatred, no longer thinking of his personal safety, but determined to have his revenge, he continued: "Ah! you kill people, you massacre them, you are a galley slave, you re-enter society though its doors were closed against you for ever, and you violate society by forcing yourselves into its ranks. You violate public esteem, and the day an unfortunate man comes to you, forgetting what you are, intoxicated by your wealth, you set on to him the myrmidons of the law who really ought to have arrested you. I am lost now, for you have raised the alarm, but I shall not be the only victim. You have put one foot into the mire, and you shall not get out of it, you shall be swallowed up. Ah! you don't know, idiots that you are, that I am capable of anything, that I respect nothing, I have no wife, children, or parents to love, I have no friends. I am struggling with you to save my own life, even though it should cost your own. I am living in order to enjoy life, and not to enable others to enjoy it, nothing keeps me here, except my hatred. He who places himself across my path, I destroy. This murderer wants to ruin me, and I shall ruin him. I am a thief, and a swindler, very good, but I am not a murderer! I am saving my life, but I am not taking any one else's, and this man is complaining about me. Ah! you are done for. You are lost, neither gold nor silver can save you, you put a chain round my neck, but I will also put one round yours!"

And Lorémont shook his fist in a threatening manner in the direction of Paris. He then sat down, tired and footsore. After resting for half-an-hour he got up, for it was coming on to rain. He allowed the drops to fall on his burning forehead, and felt that it did him good. Then feeling much calmer, he felt in his pockets and consulted his pocket-book. "I have still six hundred francs," said he, "with that, I can settle the business, and that's all I ask!" He then proceeded to the nearest railway station and returned to Paris, having very properly concluded that it would be the best place to find a costume that would excite less astonishment than the one he was wearing. The next evening, he made his appearance at the Western Railway station, nicely dressed, and took a ticket for Le Mans.

XIV

JUST as Petite was being arrested at Saint-Germain, the police made a raid on the house in the Route d'Argenteuil, and Grosbouleau and Lalongneur spent the night at the Prefecture of Police. Grosbouleau said to his friend:

"But what consoles me, is that Petite was not there, she is a sharp girl, and will not be caught."

"It's that scoundrel of a Lorémont who has 'peached' on us."

"Yes, but the long-bearded man said he would save us."

"But have you confidence in him?"

"I am certain he will save us."

"Why?"

"Because he wants Lorémont to be taken."

"Lorémont is arrested."

"No fear ! if he were taken, he would not have had us arrested."

"Why ?"

"Because we should be the living proof of what he is accused of."

"It's true. But why has he got us arrested ?"

"To have us condemned for what he himself has done."

"But we shall inform against him."

"Yes, but he has disappeared, and they don't know where he is."

"That's true."

"You know," resumed Grosboubleau, "we have done nothing."

"All right."

"If they question you, say you quite thought you were removing a baron's furniture."

"Very good."

"But don't 'peach' on the baron."

"All right."

"The baron is an original fellow who had several country houses to accommodate his lady friends, and we thought he was very rich."

"Understood."

"And we must not depart from this version. I hope Petite won't allow herself to be caught."

"As they went away with us, there will be no one remaining in the house, so that when she goes back, the neighbours will put her on her guard, and she will run away."

"Lalongueur," said Grosboubleau, suddenly assuming a solemn expression, "we are two old friends, eh ?"

"Certainly, my boy."

"You swear to me that if they arrest Petite, you will say nothing about her."

"You ask me such a thing as that ! Why I would rather be cut up into mincemeat."

"You swear ?"

"On all that I hold sacred in this world !"

Grosboubleau shook hands with Lalongueur, and the next morning the two friends were separated.

At the same time as this was going on, Cardinet, sitting with Linotte in a private room at Brébant's said :

"Just see, Jeanne, what a good thing it was you joined me."

"Why is that ?"

"Lorémont has just been arrested at Saint-Germain, and his two accomplices are about to rejoin him at the Prefecture."

"How's that ?"

"Why, it's very simple. I got M. Nither to make a declaration, he being the real proprietor of the house that was broken into on the Ile de la Grande-Jatte ; the inquiry has commenced. I helped him, and this evening all our enemies are in prison."

"What about Lorémont ?"

"In prison."

"And I shall not see him any more ?"

"No, except in your dreams."

"Oh ! Cardinet, I must kiss you," said the delighted Linotte, throwing her arms round his neck.

"Yes, but that's not all," said he, "to-morrow I have a long letter to write, but I must send a telegram to Jacques."

He called the waiter, and gave him the message telling him to send it to the telegraph office. It ran as follows:—"M. Bérard, Hotel du Pigeon, Roscoff—Baron conquered—everything saved—can sleep in peace—affair has succeeded—Letter to-morrow—Cardinet."

"And now," said he, "we can get our supper."

And, whilst everything was going wrong, the two friends sat down to supper, convinced that the affair was completely and successfully terminated.

END OF PART II.

PART III.

THE PAST.

I.

IT was an afternoon in September, the weather was dull and misty, and great black clouds were careering along in the fleecy sky. A man, simply dressed, riding a small, wiry horse, was going along the road leading from Morlaix to Saint-Pol-de-Léon, a road which appears to have been made more for goats than men. Narrow, and occasionally covered in by trees, it looks like a verdant tunnel. Then, suddenly emerging from there, it winds along the plain in tortuous bends, like some immense serpent, continually ascending and descending. A steep, hard, flinty road, on which the horses' hoofs clatter and cause sparks to fly in all directions; a barren road, which, like the country it traverses, has never felt the magic touch of Progress. The religion of the country has kept everything in a backward state; roads, towns, and people. What has fallen has remained in ruins, nothing has been actually pulled down, but everything is crumbling away, falling into ruins, dying out, and nothing springs up to replace what disappears. The worship of the dead past is there carried to excess, and the future seems to cause fear. Even as this barren worship of bygone days has prevented the people making any progress, so does Nature herself appear to remain at a standstill, and on the same level as the inhabitants of this stronghold of fossilized Conservatism. The people can only make a living out of this barren land by dint of hard and unceasing labour, and the very trees themselves are of a dwarfish standard, so poor is everything in this curious corner of Brittany.

The man continued his journey, but night was coming on before he arrived at the Soleil d'Or, the best hotel in Saint-Pol-de-Léon. After having had his horse taken to the stable, he ordered a dinner which the people of the establishment looked upon as a luxurious repast, for to do these poor people justice, their cooking was very bad, and did not lead one to suppose that they indulged much in the pleasures of the table. When the dinner was served up, the traveller requested the landlord to sit down with him for a few minutes and take a glass of wine.

"Dear sir," said the man to the hotel-keeper, "am I far from Roscoff?"

"About two leagues."

"Isn't there a diligence running there?"

"Yes, sir; twice a day."

"At what time?"

"Oh! there is none to night; nothing till to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"But there must be private carriages?"

"No, sir."

"What," said the man, surprised; "within two miles of a watering-place there are no private carriages to be had."

"But, sir, Roscoff is not a watering-place."

"But people bathe there?"

"Yes."

"So there must be a bathing establishment, a Casino, and promenades?"

The landlord of the *Soleil d'Or* opened his eyes and mouth, and looked at the traveller as if he did not understand what he meant. At length he said:

"At Roscoff there are the rocks of Sainte-Barbe, and the Figuier, but I have never seen anything else."

"What; there is no bathing establishment?"

"No, sir."

"But who are the people who go to Roscoff during the season?"

"People from Rennes and Morlaix."

"And what do they do?"

"Well," said the landlord, naively, "I don't quite understand; those people come thirty leagues to see an ugly port, and have a little sea-bathing, a thing I don't understand. At Morlaix and Rennes, two fine towns, they have all they want, and yet they go where they have nothing at all."

"But there must be some hotels?"

"There are two taverns; the best of which is not so good as mine."

"But when there are a lot of people, where do they lodge?"

"Where they can—with the fishermen."

"But they can't be very comfortable."

"No," said the landlord. "Moreover, there is no comfort anywhere in the town."

"But you frighten me: Roscoff is a dull hole then?"

"Well, sir, I did not dare to tell you so, but such is my opinion."

After having reflected for a few minutes, the man resumed:

"But how could I get to Roscoff this evening?"

"Do you really want to go this evening?"

"Certainly."

"I must warn you the weather is getting bad, that the wind is in the west, that's a sign of rain, and the sea will be rough. It would be dangerous for you, a stranger in the district, to go along the coast alone."

"What you say makes me more determined than ever to go."

"Ah! you want to enjoy the view. I bet you are a Parisian; and that you have said to yourself: 'The bad weather is coming on, I must see that.'"

"Just so."

"We, who belong to these parts, despise all that. But it may be interesting for those who have never seen it before. Ah! there is one way you could do it, and that is on horseback."

"But my horse has already done the journey from Morlaix to Saint-Pol-de-Léon."

"Well, sir; I can find you a horse and a guide who will conduct you there."

"That's what I've been asking you for."

"That's the best thing you can do, sir. At Roscoff, there is nothing remarkable, nothing good, whilst here you have everything you want. In the first place, you have regular trains, and your letters every morning, whilst at Roscoff you wait two days. By staying here you can get to

Roscoff in an hour whenever you want to go ; you come back, and find a good table and a first-class bedroom, two things you will not find in the wild country you wish to visit."

"It was my intention to stay at your hotel, but I must go to Roscoff to-night."

"Excuse me for a few minutes," said the landlord, getting up and going out, whilst the stranger hastily finished his dinner. When the landlord came back he was ready to start.

"Sir," said the landlord, "young Pornéon will show you the way. It will only cost you a crown, but you must make haste, for it is already getting dark. Above all, wrap yourself up well, for you will have rain before you get back."

"Very good," said the man, "and many thanks."

Whilst the stranger was undoing his portmanteau to take out an overcoat, the landlord of the *Soleil d'Or* went out and came back again immediately, bringing with him a book, an inkstand and a pen.

"Sir," said he, "I will have your bag and portmanteau taken up to number four ; will you kindly enter your name in this book ?"

"Certainly," said the man, taking the pen and writing, "Rémond, representative of the firm of Nither and Co., going to Roscoff and Brest." On writing the last word, the man who described himself as Rémond made a singular grimace. Turning towards the landlord, he said : "As I am going to start in very bad weather I think I will take in a little ballast. You have no doubt in a corner of your cellar a good bottle of old brandy. If so bring it up." The landlord did as requested, and a few minutes afterwards he, his guest, and the guide were clinking glasses together. The glasses having been emptied, the two latter started off. Going out of the hotel, Rémond said to the boy :

"And where are the horses ?"

"Just outside the village. We must not make any noise in the street at this time of night. Follow me, please."

• They then climbed up a steep hill where the road leading to the sea commenced. There the youngster whistled twice, and a boy immediately came out of one of the houses, leading a saddle-horse.

"There's only one horse ?" asked Rémond.

"Isn't that what you asked for ?"

"Yes ; but there's only one, where's yours ?"

"Oh," said the boy, slapping his legs, "here's my pony, and he is a strong animal ; I shall run in front of you and show you the road."

"All right," said Rémond, lighting a cigar, and bestriding his horse ; when he was well in the saddle, he added to the boy : "I am waiting for you." "Let go the bridle and don't be afraid !" said the boy, running on in front. The horseman gave his mount his head, touched him with the spurs, and the horse started off at a gallop. It was a pitch dark night, and they could already feel the sea breeze. Young Pornéon ran ahead, keeping about ten paces in front of the horse. The road by the sea is very cheerful in the day-time, but exceedingly dull at night. It runs across fields covered with artichokes, and sometimes on the left, sometimes on the right, runs a small stream, on which stands a mill. After about an hour's riding, the two nocturnal travellers arrived on the sea-shore. The wind was blowing strong and sharp, and the waves sent the pebbles rolling on the beach with a terrible roar. Moreover, it was raining, a cold, fine rain, blown about by the wind. They went through the village, and struck out

towards the rocks of Sainte-Barbe. Suddenly young Pornéon stopped, and pointing to a black mass on the roaring waters, said: "Oh! look at that!"

"What is it?" asked the man, stopping his horse.

"Oh! great heavens! if there is any one in the boat, they will certainly be killed."

Suddenly a frightful noise, followed by a crash, made the boy draw back, and the horse rear. An immense wave rolled in and threw at their feet a wrecked boat, and a man tumbled out on to the seaweed. Rémond jumped from his horse, and went with the boy, to the assistance of the man who had landed in such a peculiar way. They picked up the poor fellow, who was unconscious, and took him into a wine-shop. By the light of the tallow candle, Rémond, who was holding the shipwrecked man up, looked at him, and muttered in a half-whisper: "It's he!" Overcoming his emotion he said to the landlord: "Give us a glass of good brandy!" After having drunk this the individual was soon on his legs again.

"Where am I!"

"Oh! you are at Roscoff, close to the rocks of Sainte-Barbe."

"Thanks," said the man, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"But," asked the landlord, "how came you to go out in such frightful weather?"

"I went out this afternoon in a little pleasure boat to go to the Ile de Bas, but it was quite fine then. What time is it now?"

"Eight o'clock."

"They must be fearfully anxious about me at the hotel," said the shipwrecked man, who, unknown to himself, was being closely watched by Rémond, who was standing in a dark corner.

"Sir," said the shipwrecked man, "could you have me taken back to my hotel. I don't feel very strong, I have been so upset that I am afraid I might faint away on the road."

"Sir," said Rémond getting up, "I have my horse here, if you like to mount it, I will take you home."

"I accept, sir," said the man, taking Rémond's arm, and going out with him. They put him on the horse and young Pornéon took the bridle.

"Where are we going, sir?" asked he.

"To the Pigeon Blanc."

"Ah! opposite the church!"

"Yes, that's it."

The little caravan then started off through the only street in Roscoff, towards the hotel. Though it was a very singular group, no one saw it, the tempest having obliged the inhabitants to close their doors earlier than usual. It was in vain that Rémond tried to commence a conversation, his voice was drowned by the wind. They soon arrived at the hotel, and a young woman immediately rushed out and threw herself into the arms of the shipwrecked man, saying:—

"Ah! here you are at last!"

"Yes, and it's thanks to this gentleman that I have got back."

"Oh! you exaggerate, sir, I merely picked you up, I didn't save you."

"Come in, sir, I beg of you," said the young woman.

"Madame, I beg you to excuse me—I am obliged to go away."

"Ah! sir, you will not refuse to come in a moment so that I may thank you."

"I will receive your thanks here, madame; moreover, I shall see you again, sir, as I am coming back to Roscoff in a few days."

"But may I ask your name?"

"Rémond!"

"As I only allow you to go away on condition that you will come back again, you will ask for M. Bérard."

"M. Bérard—I will remember the name."

Whilst Bérard slipped a napoleon into Pornéon's hand, Madame Bérard thanked Rémond again, saying:—

"I will thank you more fully, sir, when we have the pleasure of seeing you again."

"And that will be very shortly, madame."

Bérard wanted to shake hands with the man, but he was already mounted and galloping along the Saint-Pol road, followed by Pornéon.

II.

WHEN the horseman and his guide had passed the last houses in Roscoff, Rémond stopped his horse and said:—

"The wind is very high to-night, my boy, do you know a little tavern where we could stop and get a drink?"

"Yes, sir, but why did you come to Roscoff? you hardly get here, before you are going away again."

"Do you regret having come here?"

"Oh! no, rather not," said the boy, tightening his hold on his gold coin.

"I've got a 'yellow boy.'"

"Well, tell me where we can go."

"I will take you to Haulon."

"To Haulon?"

"Yes, to Haulon, to the Taverne de l'Ancre d'Or."

"Ah! L'Ancre d'Or, that's it—come on," said the man.

The boy took the horse's bridle, and turning to the left, led it to the bottom of a valley. At the extremity of the village, abutting on the bridge, is a small house of rustic appearance. It has one storey, the walls are covered with grape vines, and in front is a small garden; behind the house is a kitchen garden, running down to the water's edge. This is the Ancre d'Or. The large room is cheerfully lighted up at this time of night, and in the middle is an immense table, on which twelve covers are laid and around which sit twelve guests, talking, calling out, eating and drinking, especially drinking, all fellows with thirsty throats, tanned skins, and illuminated noses, without importance for our story. Peasants' merry-makings are always noisy affairs, and this one formed no exception to the general rule. The street door opened, and young Pornéon went in, and silenced the noisy crew by saying:—

"Just be quiet, here's a traveller; besides it's time to close, you have all had enough, leave us in the room alone."

They all got up and went out, leaving young Pornéon and the stranger alone in the room. Rémond sat down at a table, and called for something to drink; then, asking for writing materials, he wrote the following lines: "Madame, I have something important to say to you, something requiring the strictest secrecy. Kindly be near the rocks of Sainte-Barbe to-morrow at three o'clock. Pray do not be afraid, this communication is intended for a mother, in the interests of her children." He folded the letter, wrote on it "Madame ——" then handing it to the boy, said:

"You have already earned one napoleon, would you like to earn another?"

"Oh! yes, sir."

"You saw that lady just now?"

"The wife of the man we took back to the Pigeon Blanc."

"Yes."

"Well, sir, what must I do?"

"Run and carry this letter to her."

"To the hotel?"

"Yes, but you must not let anyone see you."

"Oh! that's not difficult, I can go in the back way."

"But above all, don't let her husband see you."

"I understand," said the boy, with a knowing look.

"Well, make haste, I'll wait for you."

"And if I succeed?"

"If you succeed, you shall have another napoleon."

"Get it ready!" said the boy, running away in high glee, "I am quite at home in these love affairs."

Young Pornéon ran away whilst Rémond, leaning on the table, said in a half whisper: "To-morrow I'll settle the affair." The rain was beating against the house, and the howling wind made the doors and windows rattle. Leaning with his elbows on the table, listening to the tempest, the traveller could not help being influenced by his lugubrious surroundings. Around him the people of the house were going backwards and forwards, closing the shutters, fixing the doors, and taking in the fishing-tackle which had been left outside to dry. The master of the house came in, shook the rain off his clothes, and said to his wife:

"I've taken in our boats; we can't tell what may happen to-night, it's blowing a terrible gale, and I would not take anyone to the Ile de Bas for all the money in the world."

"There's nothing in sight?" asked the woman.

"No, fortunately; should a ship come anywhere near the coast it would be broken to pieces with this westerly wind."

"Are all the boats in?"

"Oh! yes, I didn't see a single woman on the jetty, so everyone must have come in, thank God!"

Rémond had raised his head, and now said to the landlord:

"Is the weather getting worse?"

"Yes, sir, we shall have a terrible night, don't you hear the shingle?"

"But the rain?"

"The rain will cease perhaps, but it won't be any finer for that!"

"The fact is, I must return to Saint-Pol-de-Léon."

"Well, sir, if I were you, I should not go back. The roads are ploughed up, full of ruts and sloughs; one must know the country well to find one's way!"

"You quite frighten me."

"Why, sir?"

"Because I am wondering where I shall find lodgings if I do not return."

"Oh! you need not be anxious on that score."

"It's all very well for you to talk."

"But, sir, we have rooms here."

"Ah! and what about my horse?"

"As it is under shelter it can stay where it is."

"All right, then," said Rémond; "but I heard you talking about boats just now. I saw you take your nets in, and was afraid this was simply a fisherman's house, where his colleagues occasionally came to drink."

"Well, I am a sailor, but in order to give my wife and daughter something to do I opened this tavern. It is a tavern for my colleagues, it's true, but I have one or two rooms for people that come from Roscoff, and who don't like to stay in the village."

"I understand, but you are a fisherman, are you not?"

"I do a little of everything. I am a sailor."

"I should like to go out to sea."

"I wouldn't go out for a silver net or even a golden house, a night like this!"

"But I don't mean to-night, this weather won't last long."

"If you wait a minute I'll see," said the fisherman, opening the door, and thus enabling them to hear the roaring of the sea and the whistling wind. The landlord went across the road, got up on a hillock, and, regardless of the wind and rain, put his hands to his eyes and looked out to sea. He then went in and told Rémond the storm would not last more than about four hours, and that they would have splendid weather the next day. This assurance that the weather would improve the next day greatly comforted Rémond, who said to the landlord:

"Sit down and take something with me, I want to ask you for a little information."

"You are very kind, sir," said the fisherman, placing another glass on the table and sitting down with his customer.

"You can tell me where to find the man I want, a man who knows his business, and with whom I have nothing to fear," said Rémond, clinking glasses with his landlord.

"Certainly, sir."

"I have come to the seaside for the benefit of my health. I prefer this wild spot to any more pretentious place, where people go rather for fashion's sake than from taste."

"The water is clean here," said the fisherman, "it isn't like your sewers at Havre, Dieppe, and Trouville."

"I have never been on an excursion out to sea."

"Really!"

"No, I've been in a steamer from Havre to Trouville, and to Caen, but that is not what I should like to do. I want to see the ocean from a fishing boat, the open sea, in short, and to see myself, so little, in this immensity."

"Ah! you haven't bad taste, you like fine things," said the fisherman, delighted at the picture of the sea drawn by his customer.

"I should like to find a man who would take me thirty leagues from here."

"Thirty leagues! what to do?"

"To land, dine, and sleep before coming back."

"Thirty leagues; you would have to go towards the East—to Jersey—between twenty and thirty leagues."

"Jersey; that's English, isn't it?"

"Yes!"

"Well, it's an excursion that would suit me very well—the sea—to spend a night on foreign soil. But you would have to find me a reliable man, a good sailor."

The landlord of the *Ancre d'Or* got up, took off his cap and said : "A real sailor, a reliable man, a man who is as much at home on the sea as a fish is in it, who says : In an hour's time I shall be there, who, should the weather get bad, and the wind rise, would say : Let us go no further, let us lay to—a man who would not lose himself on the rocks of Triagoz, who knows the way along the Dover rock, who avoids the great bank, Crelet Bay, and arrives at the appointed time at St. Heliers—That's what you want, isn't it ?"

"Yes," said Rémond, feeling that he was on the right track.

"A sailor who knows his road, who says : You want to dine there ; we will leave at three o'clock, and to-morrow at that time we shall have a southerly wind and we shall get there about eight o'clock."

"That's the man for me, but where is he ?"

"That man," said the landlord, "is now standing before you."

"And how much do you want to do that ?"

The sailor went and resumed his place at the table, leant his elbows on it, looked intently at Rémond, and said in a lower tone : "You look like a man who would not wish to prevent a poor fellow earning his living. You want to go on an excursion out at sea. You won't mind what we put on board the boat, and if we turn to the east or to the west to avoid the custom-house officers, you will say nothing ?"

"I should say it was delightful, and should like it immensely."

"If we do not land in the dock, and arrange so that no one sees us to ask us for our papers or what our cargo is ; if we land rather late, you will say nothing ?"

"On the contrary, anything in the shape of an adventure will please me."

"Well," said the fisherman, "I will take you for fifty francs, there and back. Is that too much ?"

"No."

"Well, shake hands," said he, holding out his hands, which Rémond took. The landlord then called out to his wife :

"Catherine, give us a good glass of gin. I should like you to taste that, sir."

Catherine was just pouring out the gin, when young Pornéon came in : the poor boy was wet through, and the water was streaming down his clothes.

"Well ?" said Rémond, anxiously.

"It's done, sir."

"What did she say ?"

"She will be there between one and two o'clock, in the chapel."

"Very good, here's your napoleon."

"But," said the boy, "we cannot go back yet, it isn't fit to turn a dog out to-night."

"We are going to sleep here, and to-morrow you will take the horse back, for I shall not go back till the day after to-morrow."

"Here you are, boy, drink that, and then go to bed."

"Right you are !" said the boy, taking the glass, and drinking off the contents with lightning rapidity.

The rooms having been got ready, Rémond and the boy prepared to retire.

"So it's understood for to-morrow ?" said the fisherman to Rémond.

"Yes," said the latter, "we will embark between two and three o'clock."

"Good!" said the man, then walking up to his guest he whispered: "You don't mind if we take you on board just beyond the rocks of Sainte-Barbe, a small creek?"

"Oh! no, on the contrary!"

"Very good, it's understood! To-morrow morning I will tell you what signal to use to let me know when to come out."

"Very good, good-night."

"I fancy I shall do a good stroke of business to-morrow!" said the fisherman to his wife as the two travellers went away.

III.

THOUGH we have got a long way into our story, our readers have hardly once seen our heroine, Madame Bérard. Before going any further, we will give them a description of this interesting and sympathetic character, and it may perhaps please them to make the acquaintance of a really pure and good-hearted woman, after having heard so much about the miserable knaves we have been forced to present to them. We are obliged, in order to describe the truth, to paint what really took place, for the drama we are relating is not a fiction, but a true story, and the principal actors are still living and suffering from the effects of it.

Madame Bérard worshipped her husband. She made his acquaintance when he was a poor man, working from morning till night for a very small salary, in a shop where, after he had been there a month, his master held him up as an example. He was a very hardworking man, and she, being a hardworking girl, naturally respected Bérard, so when he solicited her hand, she accorded it with pleasure. This had happened in a very romantic way. Every evening, as she left her work to go home, she met Jacques Bérard, and every morning, as she left home to go to her shop, she found herself face to face with the young man employed at M. Nither's. Mademoiselle Aimée Fontaine was a real Parisienne, a fair type of the work-girl, a daughter of the people who lived by her daily labour, and, winter and summer, was up with the lark, and off to her work, gay and happy as only girls are at that age. However respectable a girl may be, however contented she may be with her humble lot in life, she still has a heart, and that heart beats all the faster from the fact of it being kept under restraint. Meeting a handsome young fellow night and morning, seeing him so attentive and gallant, and finding that even an encouraging smile had not vanquished his timidity, it came to pass that the young girl's heart was really won, though they had never spoken to each other beyond such commonplace phrases as: "Pray pass on, miss." "Excuse me, sir." "It's very cold this morning, miss." "Yes, I am frozen." "Good evening, miss." "Good evening, sir."

Nevertheless it seemed as if they knew each other intimately, and Mademoiselle Aimée Fontaine was furious when M. Jacques Bérard left home too early in the morning, or came home too late at night; so that she did not meet him. On such occasions she would say to herself: "People are quite right when they say you can never rely on men; it would be folly to do so." This went on until one day, being alone in her room, she said to herself: "What a handsome fellow! hardworking, quiet. He is always at work, and must be very intelligent, for they told mother that in the

space of two years he had become principal clerk in a commission house, and that he was soon going to be taken into partnership. But it's very strange he should be so timid. He is afraid to look at me when he is talking, and lowers his eyes, and yet—" She looked at herself in the glass, and smiled, as if perfectly satisfied with what she saw. Then she continued :—" But when he thinks I am not looking at him, ah ! 'tis then he looks at me, and I can guess what his looks mean. But it's funny he should be as timid as that, with such ideas as those. After all, he's only a clerk, I am a milliner, and we might marry !" Aimée was a milliner ; obliged to live in the work-room, she could not help hearing whatever was said there and consequently learnt many things a young girl ought never to know. Constantly hearing such frivolous and vicious talk, the fire which consumed her heart sometimes made her writhe beneath a pain she did not understand.

One Sunday evening in June, she was leaning out of her window, and thinking, her eyes fixed on Jacques' window. She could see him, with his hands to his forehead, leaning on the table, reading. On seeing him thus, she experienced a peculiar, unknown sensation ; it seemed that a new element had become mingled with her blood and made her shiver in a strange manner ; her hands had a nervous twitch, her bosom heaved convulsively, whilst the atmosphere, laden with the scent of the clematis, oppressed and intoxicated her. She glanced first at the opposite window and then at the purple sky, and unable to distinguish anything further, mingled in her girlish thoughts the man she loved and the purple sky she was watching. Continuing to indulge in this dreamy meditation, unconscious of the reason of the strange sensation which was pervading her whole being, she yet felt a peculiar charm in this delicious nameless fever. All at once she thought she could hear a voice singing in the silence of the summer evening. This voice, which she recognized, was singing a love song. What young girl does not lend a willing ear to such a song, especially when sung by the man of her heart ? She listened, and, looking out of the window, saw that Jacques had closed his book, and, unconscious of being overlooked, was walking up and down the room singing the song in question. When he had finished, she could not help singing the chorus of the sentimental ditty.

Through the window on the stairs, Aimée saw a young girl go past arm-in-arm with a young fellow who, people said, was soon going to marry her. They made a charming pair as they walked along, nestling close together, their faces occasionally meeting as if to exchange a kiss. With clenched hands and flashing eyes Aimée turned away from this amorous scene. Distracted, asphyxiated by this atmosphere of love which was stifling her, she angrily exclaimed :—" But will he never love me !"—A shiver ran through her whole frame, she sobbed bitterly, and the tears streamed down her cheeks. She was really charming as she stood thus, fresh and rosy, in the romantic setting of this embowered window. Suddenly she started up, determined to overcome this weakness, and, looking out of her window, saw with astonishment that the young man was standing at his. Aimée at once drew back, but not quick enough to avoid seeing Jacques throwing kisses at her. She smiled, blushed, and, feeling greatly confused, buried her face in her hands.

" I will come round ! " cried Jacques, closing his window.

" Oh ! " said she, shocked, " he must be mad ! "

Jacques put his hat on saying : " I must be a fool to hesitate like this—

"I'll put an end to my suspense," and, without any further reflection, he ran round, ascended the other staircase, and knocked at a door on which was printed : FONTAINE, STATIONER. Mrs. Fontaine came to the door.

"What do you want, sir?" said she.

"To speak to M. Fontaine on important business."

"Come in, sir, you are our neighbour—here is M. Fontaine."

"What is it?" asked the latter, raising his spectacles.

"Monsieur Fontaine," said Bérard, who was breathless, "I am your opposite neighbour, and have lived in the house for two years; I am employed by the firm of Nither and Co., my name is Jacques Bérard, and I have come to ask you for your daughter's hand."

"What!" said Fontaine, astounded, "sit down!"

"No, sir—if you will allow me, I will retire; think over what I say, I will come back to-morrow—good evening, madame, good evening, sir," and Jacques went out just as quick as he had come in.

"Who's he?" asked Fontaine.

"That's our neighbour whom I have spoken about."

"But he's mad!"

"That may be; but he has money."

"Oh! that's another thing then," said the old man.

Jacques, once he got back to his own room, his face as red as a poppy, said to himself: "What audacity I must have had!" And Mademoiselle Aimée, who had understood what was going on when she saw him come into her house, said to herself: "He was pretending to be timid." We will go no further, suffice it to say that they were mutually struck with each other, and married three months afterwards. This affection, so sudden in its birth, had not diminished during the last five years. The first cloud was caused by what occurred at their departure from Paris, for a servant had said to Aimée—"The carriage outside brought a lady who has been three times to see M. Bérard." And Aimée had left Paris with this doubt in her mind. On receiving Rémond's letter she said to herself: "Can this be what I was frightened about?" and that is why she told young Pornéon she would be at the chapel at the appointed time. She threw the letter into the fire, but not without a pang, for it was the first time she had ever concealed anything from her husband.

IV.

THE Chapel of Sainte Barbe had been erected by the pious care of some unfortunate people who had been spared from a watery grave; when in mid-ocean, with the masts and rudder gone, they felt they were lost, and knelt down and made a vow that if saved they would erect a chapel in honour of Sainte Barbe, in which a blessed candle should be kept constantly burning—the sailors, and especially Breton sailors, still retain their touching faith in the power of prayer. There was a lull, and they contrived to get into port, as soon as they landed, they went barefooted to the top of the rocks, and there thanked their patron saint who had saved them. Within a year the chapel was finished and ornamented with various pious offerings. Whenever any notability of the town died, he was buried near the chapel. At this moment, the soil is paved with tombstones for fifteen yards around. The day was, as the landlord of the Ancre d'Or had predicted the previous evening, beautifully fine, when a veiled woman, followed by a

servant leading two children, came out of the chapel about two o'clock. Rémond was waiting, and, as soon as he perceived her, came up and bowed. She said :

"Was it you who wrote to me yesterday, sir?"

"Yes, madame."

Turning round to the servant, Madame Bérard said : "Marie, go down to the Pointe with the children—and be very careful."

The Pointe is a grassy hillock about ten steps below the chapel, and a beautiful view of the sea is obtained from there. Madame Bérard looked at the man by her side, and her impression was not very favourable, for she said to herself : "This man frightens me !" When she saw that the servant and the children had got some distance away, she said :

"What have you to say to me, sir?"

"Madame, I have a most important secret to reveal to you."

"A secret only intended for my ears?"

"Yes, madame."

"Who is it about?"

"Your husband !"

Madame Bérard turned pale, but overcoming her emotion, she told him she was ready to hear what he had got to say—

"Madame," said he, "life has its hardships, if I have come to meet you here, it is because I considered the revelation I have to make to you worth the trouble. Personally, I am not interested in your knowing or ignoring what I offer to tell you—I simply want to live."

"I do not understand you, sir."

"And yet it's very simple, madame, I have come to sell you something which will be useful to you."

"Ah ! very good," said Aimée disdainfully. This explanation pleased her. She felt more at her ease, she had been afraid of having to deal with a too anxious friend or an enemy, and was relieved to find that this man was only a vulgar swindler, who had no designs on her heart or person, but simply on her purse.

"But sir, before paying for such a singular thing, I must at least be allowed to judge of its value."

"That's impossible, madame."

"I don't know you, your mysterious, singular conduct naturally excites my suspicion."

"Well madame, if you like to put me to the proof, question me, and I will give you information about things which greatly interest you."

"But for that you would have to know my fears."

"I do know them, madame."

"You know what is going on in my house and in my own mind?"

"Yes, madame."

Madame Bérard, who now began to feel anxious, looked intently at this man. Their eyes met, and she was frightened, so frightened that she looked around her. It was a fine day, and there were a few people at the Pointe ; feeling relieved, she said :

"But tell me a part, sir, so that I may know what you mean."

"I will only speak, madame, of the affair that is tormenting you the most. You left Paris with a doubt in your mind, you know that a woman has called on your husband several times, and are afraid there is an intrigue going on between this woman and M. Bérard."

"It's true. How do you know that?"

"It's my trade to know these things."

"And is that the nature of the secret you have to dispose of?"

"No, madame, I can explain everything about this matter. The woman who called several times at your house in the Rue d'Enghien was formerly your husband's mistress."

"Ah!" said Madame Bérard, turning pale and clinging to a rock.

"I am speaking of the past," added Rémond, smiling.

"Pray explain, sir, for I am suffering greatly."

"You have nothing to reproach M. Bérard with—on that score."

"Ah! well, tell me quickly."

"This woman knew M. Bérard sixteen years ago."

"Why did you not say so before?" said Aimée, greatly relieved. Then suddenly looking gloomy again, she added: "But why did she wish to see him?"

"Because the poor girl is in poverty, and wanted a little money."

"Poverty!" said Madame Bérard, remembering what she had been told: "a woman coming in a private carriage, and dressed in the height of fashion."

"That was necessary in order to gain admittance—there is such a thing as genteel poverty."

"What's this woman's name?"

"She is known under two names, Linotte and Jeanne de Sillac. Here is the card she left for your husband."

"Neither of these names are correct," said Aimée, taking the card and reading the words Linotte had written in pencil.

"That may be."

Madame Bérard meditated for a few minutes on what was best to be done, the singular profession her interlocutor was engaged in inspired her with the greatest disgust, and she would have liked to be far away, she hesitated about asking him anything, fearing she might hear of some misfortune, and yet she was burning to know the worst. After a pause she resumed:

"And is this secret very important?"

"On it depends your future and that of your children."

"What are you saying?"

"The truth, madame."

"But pray explain yourself—the future of my children—and what about my husband?"

"His future will be in your hands." Then determined to have an immediate settlement, Rémond continued: "Should I tell what I know to anyone but you, were I to reveal this secret to one of your husband's enemies or competitors, you, your husband and your children would be completely ruined."

"You terrify me."

"If you wish to buy this secret, I am prepared to sell it and disappear. You can save everything. If not, I think I can find a purchaser elsewhere."

"What amount do you ask?"

"To your husband, I would have sold it for half of what he possesses."

"Half?"

"But to you for twenty thousand francs."

"Twenty thousand francs! but I have not that amount."

"I only ask you for an instalment—what you can spare."

"I think I have about ten thousand francs altogether, as I pay all our accounts."

"Well, this is what I propose : you shall give me ten thousand francs ready money, and a note of hand for a similar sum to be paid me by your London agents."

"I accept, but I have not the money with me now."

"Madame, it is now half-past two, come back in an hour's time just below Sainte-Barbe. Here is the revelation with full details," said Rémond, taking a sealed letter from his pocket and showing it to Madame Bérard.

"It's understood. I'll be back in an hour's time."

"Madame," said Rémond, bowing, "I will wait for you."

Madame Bérard then rejoined her children and went back with them. Perplexed and frightened, she wondered what this terrible secret could be, and it was in vain she tried to doubt this man, for the little he had communicated convinced her he knew a great deal. She would have liked to draw back, but it was too late now ; this secret terrified her, she felt it would be the cause of great trouble, but yet longed to know what it was, saying to herself : "I will ask Jacques who this woman is ; he is straightforward, and I shall soon see if this man has spoken the truth." As soon as she got back to the hotel, she went up to her room, came down again, and showing her husband the card the man had given her, said :

"Who is this woman, Jacques ?"

Jacques, looking greatly embarrassed, turned pale on seeing the card Linotte had left for him. His wife was watching him, and wrongly interpreted his hesitation ; he guessed as much, and said frankly :

"It's a woman I knew when I was a bachelor, fifteen years ago ; I don't know what she wanted, and refused to see her."

Aimée breathed more freely, her husband was telling the truth. She embraced him and said :

"I love you, Jacques, I will go and have a walk with the children," said she, running up to her room, taking the ten thousand francs, signing a note of hand and coming down again.

V.

AIMÉE called the nurse and told her to go and fetch the donkey-man. A few minutes later the two children, looking fresh and rosy, delighted to be going out, were hoisted on a donkey, held on by the nurse and followed by M. Bérard. The little caravan soon arrived at the bottom of the Rocks of Sainte-Barbe. Bérard with a few friends took a boat, intending to row over to the Ile de Bas, and dine there, and, as it was very fine, they were to stay there till evening and come back by moonlight. When Aimée arrived at the foot of the rock she found Rémond waiting there, smoking a cigar. As soon as he saw her coming he threw away his cigar and came forward to meet her. Aimée said :

"I have brought the sum you require, sir ; I am acting very imprudently ; for in exchange for such a large sum you may only have something very commonplace to tell me."

"It really is a commonplace thing."

"What do you say ?"

"I say it is the most commonplace thing in the world."

"In that case I need not give you this large sum."

"You must know, madame, that people are not beaten in life by great things, but by commonplace trifles ; we have to fear only what we are not aware of ; when you see your enemy before you, and can see his weapons, you can struggle against him and parry his blows, but you never think of what is going on in the dark, and it is precisely your scorn which forms the strength of those who attack you."

"Would you kindly explain, sir ; and speak plainly about the fact itself."

"Madame, what I am now selling you, what I am handing over to you in this letter, is an article from a newspaper."

"An article from a newspaper !"

"Yes, madame, you can now see that I am straightforward, I tell you exactly how the case stands. I am selling you a cutting from the '*Gazette des Tribunaux*.'"

"From the '*Gazette des Tribunaux* !'"

"A condemnation !"

"But whose condemnation ?"

"Your husband's."

"But it isn't possible."

"It's quite true, madame."

Frightened, and yet not aware of the whole truth, supposing it to be some commercial affair, a bankruptcy her husband may have concealed from her, and desirous of closing the man's mouth as quickly as possible, she drew from her pocket the bank-notes and the note of hand, and said : "Here is the amount you asked for," at the same time handing them over to him. Rémond counted the notes, read the note of hand, and then handed Madame Bérard the letter he had shown her an hour previously, saying :

"Here are the papers, madame, thank God for what has happened. I had made up my mind to make this affair public, had I not received this money."

Aimée looked at Rémond but did not understand what he meant, the latter bowed and went away round the rocks of Sainte-Barbe towards the sea. Aimée held the letter in her hand, gazing at it with a fixed look. By a strange phenomenon, it seemed that the envelope was burning her fingers ; she was anxious to break the seal, and felt that, like Pandora's box, misfortune would spring from this letter. She said to the nurse : "Marie, take the children through the fields, you will find me in the chapel." Marie took the bridle to lead the donkey away in the direction mentioned, when Aimée rushed towards the children and embraced them feverishly.

"Shall I come back to you here ?" said the nurse.

"No, be at the hotel in an hour's time, and take great care of the children."

The little caravan then went off, and Aimée, left alone, was thinking of breaking the seal, when she suddenly thought she would go into the chapel and read the letter. She at once climbed up the rocks, and, arrived at the chapel, sat down at the door, as it was closed. It was a lovely afternoon, the sun was lighting up the rocks, the sea was rolling in on the beach, and the aromatic breeze from the ocean was delightfully refreshing. She broke the seal, and found that the letter contained a single sheet of white paper, on which was gummed a cutting from a newspaper. She read the first few lines, and then suddenly exclaimed : "Ah ! my God, what is this ?" With her eyes wide open, a nervous trembling running through her whole

frame, she stood there for some minutes, hardly knowing where she was. Overcoming her emotion she drew her hand over her forehead once or twice to wipe away the great beads of perspiration rolling down her cheeks, and breathed heavily, as if to clear her lungs from the great oppression she felt. Then taking up the letter once more, she read as follows :

**THE CASE OF JACQUES BÉRARD, MURDER ON THE BRIDGE OF L'ESTACADE,
SENTENCE.**

A bell rang, and the gendarme at the jury-room door appeared, followed by the jury, who all took their seats in the box. It was in vain that people tried to read in their faces the verdict they were likely to give. The ushers then announced the arrival of the judges.

The president said : " I request the public to maintain the strictest silence, any mark of approval or disapproval is forbidden." Then addressing the foreman of the jury he added :

" Have the goodness to declare the result of your consultation."

The foreman of the jury got up, as did all the rest of his colleagues, placed his hand on his heart, and said in a loud voice :

" On my honour and conscience, before God and man, the declaration of the jury is as follows :

"First question : Is Jacques Bérard guilty of having voluntarily caused the death of François Béraud, surnamed Le Charpentier, at Paris, on the Bridge of l'Estacade, on the 15th June, 1853 ?

" No, by a majority.

"Second question : Did Jacques Bérard involuntarily wound and inflict blows on the deceased without intending to kill him, but which, however, caused his death ?

" Yes, by a majority.

"Third question : Is Jeanne Binot, surnamed Linotte, guilty of having knowingly aided and abetted the author of this murder in the acts which prepared, facilitated, or carried it out ?

" No, by a majority."

The reading of this verdict was followed by considerable agitation. The president ordered the prisoners to be brought in, and the clerk of the court read the declaration of the jury to them.

The president then delivered his sentence as follows :

" In consequence of the verdict just returned, and in virtue of the powers conferred on us by the law, we order Jeanne Binot to be set at liberty immediately, unless she be required for some other offence. Take her back to prison, she shall be released shortly."

The judge ordered this to be done so as to screen her from the inquisitive gaze of the audience. She went away without so much as casting a glance at the prisoner. The president then called upon the public procurator to speak.

The latter got up and called upon the court to apply article 309 against the prisoner. The president having asked the prisoner whether he had anything to say, and the latter maintaining perfect silence, the court retired to consider the case. Half an hour afterwards they returned, and the ushers commanded silence. Everyone then rose spontaneously. The president then read out in a firm voice :

" The Assize Court of the Department of the Seine, sitting at Paris, considering the decision of the Imperial Court of Paris, having found the prisoner guilty and sent him before the Assize Court of the Department of

the Seine, this Court declares as follows : In consequence of the accusation and seeing that it results from the verdict of the jury that Jacques Bérard voluntarily wounded and inflicted blows on the deceased without intending to kill him, but which, however, caused his death, the Court, applying article 309 of the Penal Code which runs as follows :

“ Any person convicted of assault and battery will be punished with hard labour ; should such assault, contrary to the prisoner's intentions, lead to the victim's death, the guilty man will be sentenced to penal servitude.”

“ In consequence, Jacques Bérard is sentenced to ten years' penal servitude.”

Madame Bérard had read all, the paper fell from her hands, her eyes closed, and she fell unconscious on the tomb-stones with which the entrance to the chapel was paved.

VI.

RÉMOND, having carefully placed the bank-notes, &c. in his pocket-book, went to the rock of Saint-Barbe, looked around in search of the fisherman, but, not seeing him, whistled in imitation of the sea-gull. As no one replied to the signal, he waited a few minutes, and then ran to the further end of the cliffs, but could not find the small creek in which the landlord of the Ancre d'Or was to wait for him with his boat. After having renewed the signal twice, greatly annoyed by this delay, he was about to take a short cut across the fields to Houlon, and from there to Saint-Pol-de-Léon, when he suddenly saw his man spring up from behind a rock, accompanied by another individual. On seeing this latter, Rémond knitted his brows. The sailor came up to him and said :

“ Sir, you must not blame me if you did not find me sooner, the custom-house officers are going their rounds, and I was afraid of falling into their hands.”

“ Who's this man ?” asked Rémond, in a low voice, pointing to the strange individual.

“ It was understood you should shut your eyes to what went on, was it not ?”

“ Yes, he's a colleague, I suppose ?”

“ He's a brave fellow, come to assist me in the business I am engaged in.”

“ Ah ! all right, then.”

And Rémond, feeling much easier in his mind, went down the rock, by a sort of stairs cut in the granite, on to the sea-shore. The landlord of the Ancre d'Or followed him, accompanied by his mate, who he asked in a low tone :

“ Well ?”

“ It's he !”

“ What are you going to do ?”

“ We shall see that down below.”

“ The sea is deep.”

“ I have help, don't be afraid.”

“ Very good.”

“ Is it this way ?” asked Rémond, on coming to a turning.

“ Yes, yes, go on.”

They continued to descend, and in a short time the three men arrived on the sea-shore. Rémond stopped, surprised and charmed at the sight of the

immense expanse of sea. The waves were rolling in, covering the beach and rocks with foam, and occasionally wetting the feet of the three men. Rémond, after having looked around him, asked :

"But where is your boat?"

"Oh! she's coming," answered the landlord of the *Ancre d'Or*, winking at his companion. The latter whistled, and three men immediately appeared. The individual accompanying the sailor was about to spring on Rémond, but the latter, as soon as he heard the whistle, jumped on to a rock close by, and on seeing the three men appear, and hearing the man say to them, "Arrest him," did not hesitate, but hastily throwing off his jacket, jumped into the sea. On seeing his prey escape him, the man said to the sailor :

"Where's your boat, Coulord?"

"There, sir, within two steps."

"Quick! quick! come on."

Jumping up, they went round the cliff, and walked along the rocks. As soon as they got down, they ran to a small creek, where they found the boat moored. There was a man in the boat, who had been rocked to sleep by the action of the rising tide.

"Quick! quick!" cried the man they called Coulord, "take your oars and row out to sea."

The five men jumped into the boat, and the sailor cut the painter with his cutlass.

"What's that! what's the matter?" exclaimed the man, jumping up in a fright.

"A man overboard! look sharp," said the man accompanying the sailor. "Come, row away."

The three men and the man who was already in the boat took the oars and pulled out to sea; whilst the landlord of the *Ancre d'Or* took the tiller.

"Where are we going?"

"Don't be uneasy about that; we are going over there, just below the rocks of Sainte-Barbe, where that man is swimming."

Standing in the bows the man, who appeared to be commanding the others, peered with his hands over his eyes in the direction of the spot they were making for. Rémond had jumped into the sea; being a good swimmer he hoped to reach the island, thinking he might there find a fisherman who would take him in a boat to Jersey or Guernsey for a hundred or two hundred francs.

"But the fellow will not drown himself," said the landlord, "he swims like a fish."

"He will get to the island before us."

"But we must not let him get there."

"But what are we doing here?" asked Lèveillé.

"Just pull away," said the man in a threatening tone.

"All right, all right, don't get angry, steer to the right, we shall cut him off in the current."

The sailor Coulord executed his skipper's orders, and the boat was now making straight for the swimmer. In a few minutes they were close to him, and were about to pull him in, when Rémond dived under the boat, and struck out for Sainte-Barbe.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the man in the bows, "he will escape us!"

"Wait! wait," said the sailor. "We will tack, and catch up with him."

The boat responded promptly to the helm.

"Take the boat-hook, and harpoon him!"

The sailor took the boat-hook, and said to the swimmer:

"I say there, just cave in, or I will break your skull for you."

It was in vain Rémond tried to get away, the boat-hook had caught his clothes, and he was hoisted on board, and fell into the bottom of the boat unconscious.

"Let's get ashore, sharp!" said the man.

They at once pulled for the shore, and when they arrived, it was nearly dark. After having received attention, Rémond, who was gradually coming to himself, looked round to see where he was. He soon saw he was in the same tavern where he had taken Bérard the previous evening, and the landlord said to him: "It's strange, eh! it's your turn to-night!" Rémond looked at the men who were standing around him, and as he was now in possession of all his faculties he felt in his pockets and found them empty. He again looked at those around him as if to interrogate them. The man said to him: "You're looking for your pocket-book, no doubt?"

Rémond nodded his head in assent.

"I have it!"

"What do you want of me?" asked he, making an effort.

"Are you well enough to listen to and understand me?" asked the man with a singular smile.

"Yes, sir," said Rémond.

"Well, this is what I want with you. In the name of the law, I arrest you, Hippolyte Lorémont!"

Lorémont bowed his head, he was conquered!

"If you wish to avoid all scandal—for my people are waiting outside—you will take my arm and we shall go out together arm-in-arm; I can offer you a seat in my carriage, and we can go to Morlaix together. Do you accept?"

Lorémont, who felt thoroughly beaten, tired out by his attempted escape, and thoroughly discouraged, no longer felt strong enough to resist; he was caught, and could do nothing else but give himself up.

"I am ready, sir," said he.

"Take my arm," said the man, and taking Lorémont's arm and placing it in his own, he went towards the door, saying: "You see, I have not come alone, if you tried to escape, you would be caught immediately, and I should then be obliged to adopt very rigorous measures with you."

"Oh! fear nothing, sir," said Lorémont, dejectedly, "I have not the strength to resist, I can hardly stand upright."

The man, two assistants and Lorémont got into the carriage, another individual took his seat on the box, and they started off towards Morlaix, amidst the cries of the assembled spectators.

VII.

FATE, say the believers, puts its mark on those it intends to strike. What cannot be denied, is that sometimes our nature gives way to certain influences, and it seems to us that everything around us is saying, Take care! Misfortune is on you! One day the weather was fine, and Bérard, taking a boat, had gone out to sea alone, two hours afterwards, the weather changed, and in the evening, it was only by a providential chance that his

boat had been thrown on the beach, and himself saved. The next day the sun was sparkling on the green waves of the immense ocean, and he went out, feeling certain of the weather, and rowed over to the Ile de Bas—an island where the women wore a sort of mantilla that drew people from all the country, until the Parisiennes took them for ball capes—he went there to spend the day, the fisherman where he was lodging having said to him :

“It’s a fine day, we will go out and have two hours’ fishing !”

“Take me with you !” said Jacques at once.

“Certainly, Monsieur the Parisian,” the captain had replied ; “in three hours’ time we shall be at Roscoff.”

“In three hours, good—that’s dinner-time, but not later, as they would be anxious about me.”

“No, we won’t be later !”

And they went off. At three o’clock the next morning, Bérard, worn out and almost bent double, knocked at the door of the Pigeon Blanc, astonished not to find his wife waiting for him, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, or rather on that account ! The waiter opened the door.

“Is Madame Bérard in bed ?” he asked.

“Madame Bérard !” said the astonished waiter, “why she has left for Paris.”

“For Paris !” repeated Bérard, holding on to the door in order not to fall.

Not wishing to display his emotion before the waiter, he stood up and said : “Just show me upstairs.” He went up to his room, guided by the waiter. When he got into his room he asked : “What time did madame leave ?”

“She left about five to catch the eleven o’clock train.”

“And did she say nothing ?”

“Nothing. Besides, you are aware, no doubt, that she was greatly excited.”

“What do you mean, greatly excited ?”

“Yes, when she was brought in, she said very strange things.”

“When she was brought in ?” repeated Bérard, who could not understand what the man meant. Agitated, feverish, his brain on fire, and full of lugubrious ideas engendered by what he had seen at sea that day, Bérard walked up and down the room, trying in vain to understand what this sudden change meant, why had his wife left Roscoff so suddenly ? what did the waiter mean by saying she had been brought back in a very excited, almost delirious state ? The unfortunate man buried his face in his hands as if he would like to have forced his brain to emit a clear and definite idea. Feeling calmer, or thinking he was, he went up to the waiter and said : “What time did madame come in ?”

“At four o’clock.”

“Alone ?”

“No, sir, they brought her back.”

“How, they brought her back ?”

“Yes, sir.”

“But I don’t understand, pray explain yourself.”

“But were you not at Roscoff, sir ?”

“Why do you ask me that ?”

“Because every one saw what took place, and the affair upset all the country around.”

“What do you mean ?” said Bérard, getting anxious. “No, I was not at Roscoff.”

"Ah ! very good, that's it, sir ; they found madame half dead."

"Half dead ?"

"Yes, sir, near the chapel. They brought her back in an unconscious state."

"But come, what do you mean. What has happened ?" asked Jacques, quite distracted. "And what about the children ?"

"The children were with the nurse. When they saw their mamma like that, they made a terrible noise."

"But, in short, what has happened ?"

"I don't know, I simply tell you what I saw."

"But there must be something wrong, for her to be brought back like that ! some misfortune you are concealing from me. Madame Bérard has not left for Paris, she is dead perhaps."

As he said this, he trembled, and his eyes filled with tears, succumbing to fear, and dominated by the presentiments of the day, he began to weep bitterly. The waiter, touched by his tears, said :

"But, sir, I am not deceiving you, I assure you I am telling the truth."

"Yes, you are deceiving me ! you are afraid of hurting my feelings."

"No, sir, listen to me for a minute, and I will tell you everything that took place."

"I am listening, pray go on !"

"Well," said the waiter, "they brought madame back about four o'clock. The weather was bad and the people had gone up the cliff to see if there were any vessels in sight, and it was then they found madame lying in front of the chapel of Sainte-Barbe, having fainted away. The old men said it was the thunder that had struck her. As a proof of that they brought her here, and on the road she was continually saying strange things, she must certainly have been delirious. The doctor came to see her, she was better, and it was he who said she was delirious (but he's an old brute who doesn't know what he is talking about), however, he brought her to herself again. She immediately called for her children, and kissed them as if she would bite them. She then got up, told her servants to pack up, and to take places for the next diligence. They told her there was no diligence in the evening, and she replied that she must have one at any price. She must have been mad, for she gave fifty francs to be driven to Saint-Pol, where she would find a post chaise."

"With the children ?"

"With the children, the servants, the boxes, everything ; and she paid all the bills."

"And she left no message for me ?"

"On the contrary, when they told her you had gone to the Ile de Bas, and that you would not return till the evening, she replied : 'So much the better, be quick, so that we may get away before he comes back.'"

Bérard, drawing his hand over his forehead, and wiping away the perspiration that was streaming down his cheeks, said or rather gasped :

"And she said, 'let us get away before he comes back !'"

"Yes, sir ; but notwithstanding what the doctor said, everyone remarked what a pity you were not there. She was quite mad—we couldn't prevent her going away. But you must know, sir, that people struck by lightning frequently go mad at once."

"In short, she has gone away," said Bérard, striding up and down the room, with haggard eyes and contracted mouth, overturning everything that stood in his way.

"Yes, sir ; and she must have been very anxious to get away, for it was a fearful night, and she left just as it was raining in torrents, and the sea was roaring in a terrible manner."

"And she said nothing?"

"No, sir."

"She did not write anything either?"

"No, sir."

Bérard then took a turn round the room, and, buttoning up his coat in a feverish way, endeavouring to calm himself, he came up to the waiter and said :

"My friend, I want you to fetch me a horse and carriage at once."

"What, at this time of night?"

"Yes, at this time of night."

"But it's impossible!"

"You must."

"I assure, you, sir, I should like to obey you, but it's impossible."

"So," said Bérard, getting angry, "I must stay here whilst misfortune is pursuing them. But that's more impossible still."

"Listen to me, sir," said the waiter ; "I promise you that in two hours' time—it is now half past three—a carriage—"

"But I want to get to Paris at the same time as they do."

"Just so, sir."

"But how?"

"You can go and lie down for two hours."

"Yes."

"I will call you at six o'clock. You will arrive by the aid of good horses, which will cost you a heavy sum—"

"What matters!"

"You will arrive at eleven o'clock. The train which joins the Rennes express—"

"But what about them?"

"Oh! they may go as quick as they like ; they cannot get away before the express ; even if they left by the parliamentary train, you would arrive in Paris four hours in front of them."

"And are you quite sure of what you are saying?" asked Bérard, looking intently at the waiter.

"I am quite sure."

"Very good, here's a napoleon for you ; you shall have another one if I get away by six o'clock."

"You may rely on me, sir," said the waiter, joyfully. "Go to bed, and get a couple of hours' sleep. I will call you. Besides, you need not be anxious about Madame Bérard, it's only a passing excitement, she will soon get calmer, when the weather changes. On arriving in Paris, you will probably find her all right again."

The waiter was about to retire, when Bérard, who had taken up a card from the table, called him back, and asked him in an anxious, agitated voice :

"What card is this?"

"Ah! it's true ; I had forgotten ; it was a gentleman who asked for you."

"What time did he come?" asked Bérard.

"About six o'clock. He is staying here."

"Here?"

"Yes, in the room above yours."

"Take me to him at once," said Bérard.

"But the carriage?"

"You can fetch it; I shall leave at six o'clock all the same."

The waiter took up his candle and conducted Bérard to the room occupied by the visitor who had left his card. Bérard was gradually becoming calmer and less anxious. His wife and children were not exposed to the slightest danger, Aimée had left for Paris, and he thought he could guess the reason. He put aside all thought of any revelation they might have made to her respecting his past life, this seemed to him impossible; for he had received a letter from his friend Cardinet which had quite relieved him on that score. Madame Bérard's rash conduct was due, in his opinion, to the fact of her having found Jeanne de Sillac's card in his pocket. Bérard was not aware this card had been given to his wife, thinking he had kept it with other papers; and he said to himself: "Poor Aimée, she thought I was deceiving her when I said this woman was an old friend of mine. Fortunately, that is the only way she takes after her parents, she is rather hot-headed, and when I am not there, her rash temper leads her to do very stupid things. I shall find her at Rennes waiting for the express, we shall travel together, and an affectionate kiss will make her forget all about this. It is my austere mode of life that has made her like this; I live for her alone, and think of no one but her, thus the least thing annoys her; she is so accustomed to seeing me live solely for and by her, that the poor woman thinks I am deceiving her. Knowing I was out at sea and seeing bad weather come on, she must have gone over to Sainte-Barbe, and then, overtaken by the storm, terrified, her nervous nature was unable to resist the shock, and she fainted away." Somewhat reassured, and blind, like all people whom Fate strikes, Bérard waited nonchalantly for the moment of departure. He had taken up the card on the table mechanically, and having read the name—Cardinet—immediately had himself shown to the poet's room. After having pointed out the room to him, the waiter went away. Bérard knocked twice and, getting no reply, opened the door and walked in.

VIII.

CARDINET was sleeping the sleep of the just; and snoring very loudly. Bérard went up to the bedside, and gazed at his friend for a moment. He was unwilling to disturb him in his sleep; but when he remembered that the poet had been in bed since eight o'clock the previous evening, he hesitated no longer, and woke him up. The poet, starting up, said:

"Boileau, a man with a wig—"

"Cardinet, wake up!"

"Corneille—yes—but he wore a skull-cap—"

"Cardinet!"

"What—what's the matter?" said the poet, rousing himself. He sat up, and glared about with a terrible look in search of the miscreant who had dared to disturb his happy dreams.

"What do you want?"

"What; you don't recognise me?"

"You take advantage of my being asleep to shake me as if I were a carpet. Do I know anyone in this country of savages?"

"But you're still asleep—just look at me!"

Cardinet, who was now quite furious, looked at his friend intently, taking his arm, and making him put the candle quite close to his face—

"Ah!" said he, "it's you, Bérard; how are you?"

"At last!"

"But what a strange idea to call on people in the middle of the night. Is it the custom here?"

"No," replied Bérard, laughing, "and in the first place, it is nearly five o'clock."

"So the days are as dark as the nights in this part of the country?"

"No, but your curtains are drawn. I have just found your card and thought I would come up at once."

"You have just found my card?"

"Yes, as I came in."

"What! you come in at five o'clock in the morning; I must congratulate you; you are leading a fine life."

"What had you to say to me?"

"Will you let me go to sleep again, when I have told you?"

"Yes," said Bérard, laughing.

"I have come here to save you— You were pursued by the baron."

"What? the baron here?"

"Don't be afraid— All is over— He arrived yesterday, and was arrested to-day."

"You are sure of it?"

"It was I who took him."

"He had seen no one?" asked Bérard anxiously, a suspicion having crossed his mind.

"No, my friend; I have been following him since he left Paris."

"Ah! so much the better, I felt afraid."

"Now go to bed, I will tell you all about it to-morrow."

Bérard went to the window, looked out, and seeing that it was quite light, he drew back the curtains and blew out the light.

"What are you doing?" asked Cardinet, "you must be mad!"

"It's daylight, Cardinet, get up."

"Get up!"

"Yes!"

"Never!"

"I have a great deal to tell you, we must leave here in an hour's time."

"Leave here! where for?"

"For Paris!"

"For Paris!" exclaimed Cardinet, pulling the clothes over him.

"Never!"

"But you must."

"What! I've come a couple of hundred miles to take a holiday by the sea, I have promised myself a month of calm and repose. I travel one day and a night, I spend a night at sea, I get wet through to the skin, I get to the hotel and go to bed and now you want me to get up and go back to Paris! You wake me up and tell me to take up my staff and return from whence I came. No, you may kill me if you like, but you must not martyrize me. If you want me to go back, you must have me taken back in my bed, for I cannot leave it, I am asleep now."

And Cardinet turned round, plunged his head under the clothes and commenced to snore.

"Cardinet, my friend, there is something fresh, I want your advice, I may not go away perhaps, but I want your help, my wife has gone away."

"What!" exclaimed Cardinet, jumping up and sitting up in his bed, "your wife has gone away!"

"Yes."

"When? why?"

"This evening. Why? I cannot say."

"But you can guess?"

"Yes, I fancy it's a touch of jealousy."

"Jealousy! and you come home every day at this time. No wonder!"

"Cardinet, pray don't joke about it. I worship my wife, and have never changed my mode of life. I did not come home to-night, because I was caught in a storm when out at sea in a fishing-boat, I thought we were lost. Two of the sailors with us were drowned."

"But what's this you are saying!" said Cardinet, terrified.

"The truth, my friend, they locked me up in the hold; two of the sailors were washed overboard. I came back melancholy and sad, found my rooms deserted; and my wife and children gone away."

"Did she leave you a note?" asked Cardinet, jumping out of bed and hastily dressing.

"No, not a word!"

"But this is very grave! you are quite right, we must talk this over. What did you mean when you spoke of jealousy?"

"Oh! I'll tell you all about that."

"But what jealousy?"

"My wife found in one of my pockets"—

"Yes, a letter," exclaimed Cardinet; "these men are all the same. You ought to have burnt it. What an idea to preserve these compromising documents."

"But it isn't that! it's the card Linotte left for me, and on which she had written something in pencil."

"Ah! that will be easy to prove."

"Yes, if she were there."

"And yet," resumed Cardinet, "your wife is an intelligent woman. It seems to me very strange she should get so angry for such a simple thing."

"That's all I can think of."

"However, we will think over the matter carefully, tell me all about it."

"Well, come on, don't stay here, we will talk over the matter whilst walking along the sea-shore."

The two friends then went out arm-in-arm, and bent their steps towards the sea. After about ten minutes' walk, during which Bérard was making up his mind what to say to his friend, and Cardinet was coughing and sneezing to clear off the last vestiges of his sleepy torpor, they arrived on the sea-shore, on the rocks. At this spot, when the tide is low, one can walk over to the Island just opposite, a small island on which there is nothing but a battery and a few soldiers, and on which the shepherds allow their sheep to graze. It was five a.m., the tide was coming in, and it was a glorious picture; Cardinet immediately woke up, and stood in mute admiration before this daybreak at sea. Bérard, absorbed by his sombre thoughts, saw nothing of all this. When they left the hotel it was hardly daylight, and the fresh cold wind, blowing off the sea cooled their burning foreheads, whilst the morning mist made them shiver, and their

hair and beards damp. They were up to their knees in the seaweed that had been thrown up by the last tide. Through the grey morning mist could be seen a number of shadows, wandering along the rocky shore, knee-deep in the water, with hooks, small nets, and baskets; these were people fishing for crabs, shrimps, &c. The whole horizon was enveloped in this thick mist, and the silence was profound, only troubled by the roar of the waves breaking against the rocks and over the shingly beach. Cardinet and Bérard could hardly distinguish the fishing-boats, which, favoured by the morning breeze, glided swiftly by and were soon lost in the mist. When they arrived near the Roches, the day was just beginning to break, and the horizon was lighted up by a thin, blue line; gradually the rocks, the banks and the islets emerged from the sea, and in the distance could be seen the passing ships, their long silhouettes illuminated by the first rays of the rising sun. At last the whole expanse of ocean became visible, with its crested waves and limpid dark green tinges. The mist cleared off, and the day broke forth in all its splendour, the morning sun throwing its beaming rays over the whole scene.

"Oh! oh! how splendid it is! what a magnificent view," exclaimed Cardinet, with open mouth; then turning to his companion he continued: "Old man, you look quite lugubrious this splendid morning; what! you belong to the country, and you wear a vulgar frock-coat, a top hat and boots of Paris make; you make me blush, you are hideous, if I stopped here two days, I should have a smock-frock, a woollen cap, and bare feet, like those people over there; how strange you look amidst this splendid scenery, how small and ugly, and yet you are reckoned a handsome fellow, but you need your office as a background."

"When you've quite finished!" said Bérard, laughing.

"I've finished."

"You know I want to talk to you about serious matters."

"Yes, it's true, you woke me up at this early hour for that purpose. I'm all attention."

"Well, this is it. Yesterday, my wife showed me the card Jeanne left for me."

"Just wait a bit," said Cardinet, "I feel quite calm about this matter, I can therefore weigh, compare, and form a correct opinion about what you are going to tell me. Listen to my questions, and answer me categorically."

"I am ready to do so."

Cardinet meditated for a few minutes, and said:—

"When she showed you Jeanne's card, what was your wife's attitude?"

"She appeared calm, but now I think of it, she may perhaps have been somewhat excited."

"Not sombre or melancholy?"

"No, anxious."

"She didn't say anything when you acknowledged you knew Jeanne?"

"Nothing. On the contrary, she looked pleased."

"So she knows nothing?" Cardinet looked intently at his friend and said:

"You haven't been paying too much attention to one of the young girls of the town? These young things have a style of getting themselves up which frequently tempts the unsuspecting visitor."

"Certainly not, my friend, who do you take me for?"

"Why I take you for a sharp fellow, with very young blood."

"I am young," said Bérard, sadly, "in appearance, but could you see my heart, could you know what is now gnawing at it, if you only knew the number of sleepless nights I have spent, you would be surprised. I am delighted that we have two separate bedrooms at home. In my room, I lock myself in, for I am afraid of dreaming aloud. In the morning, when I wake up bathed in perspiration caused by the nightmare, I question my valet to ask him whether he has not heard me in the night. Ah ! Cardinet, what an old man I am."

"You are mad, you have nothing to fear now, all is over, and buried in the past."

They walked on in silence for some time, when Cardinet said :—

"But let us revert to your wife."

"Yes !"

"She went away without leaving a letter for you stating the reason of her departure ?"

"Without leaving a letter, or saying a word."

"Anyhow," said Cardinet, after reflecting for a moment, "you were right, we must leave at once."

"That's your opinion ?"

"Yes, that's my opinion. I am greatly perplexed by this departure, and cannot understand the reason of it."

"The only one is this—"

"Ah ! there is one then ?"

"Probably anxious, on seeing the weather change, she went to Sainte-Barbe in order to try and see my boat. But I was out at sea, fishing with some sailors from the Island. Overtaken by the storm, struck by the lightning near the chapel, she must have fallen down and fainted away."

"She fainted away, they found her up there."

"Yes, what's the matter with you ?"

"Nothing ! nothing !" said Cardinet feverishly.

"Aimée is very nervous. The shock of this storm, her fright about me—when she came to herself all that was mixed up in her brain with the story of Jeanne's card. Not seeing me, she lost her head, she often does that—and went away, taking the children with her."

"Yes, yes, that must be it !" said Cardinet quickly.

"You are of my opinion ?"

"Certainly."

"Well, what must I do ?"

"Listen, you will meet your wife at Rennes if you leave here at once ; it would be ridiculous for me to come with you. In the first place I should be in your way, you ought to meet her alone—you ought to go away at once."

"And you remain here ?"

"Yes, I shall not leave here for a few days—I tell you again, you have nothing to fear, everything is now saved."

"This is just the time I ought to be leaving."

"Well, let's go back to the hotel and you can go."

"What ! you abandon me ?"

"But you are a cruel wretch !" exclaimed Cardinet, trying to joke, "I tell you I am knocked up, and can hardly keep on my legs ; not only should I be useless to you, but I should be in your way."

"When shall you return ?"

"In two days' time."

The two friends hurried along ; on arriving at the hotel they saw a

carriage, which had been waiting for them for the last half hour. There Bérard again tried to induce his friend to accompany him, but at the latter's earnest request, he consented to go away alone.

"Good-bye, Cardinet, I shall see you in Paris in three days' time."

"Yes."

"You promise me that?"

"Yes, faithfully."

"I want to see you, to be at ease," he whispered.

"Don't be uneasy—good-bye."

"Good-bye."

The carriage soon disappeared round a corner, and Cardinet's face assumed an anxious expression; shaking his head, he murmured: "I am afraid there is some misfortune threatening him, I must obtain information. They may be able to give me some at the *Ancre d'Or*—" and the worthy fellow started off to the tavern at Houlon.

IX.

THE poet Cardinet did not live on fresh air and the morning breeze, this early walk had given him an immense appetite. When he arrived at the *Ancre d'Or*, he at once ordered a substantial breakfast, including a bottle of good white wine, and two cutlets served up in old willow pattern plates, the whole laid out on a beautifully clean white table-cloth, opposite the fire-place where a good wood fire was crackling. This was the vast smoky dining-room of the *Ancre d'Or*, lighted up by two windows with small diamond panes through which the morning sun darted its golden rays and played on the copper kettle on the fire, filling the house with a cheerful light. Here the carters could be heard crying out, whilst their horses neighed at the door; the daughter of the house, a rosy, strapping, dark-eyed Breton maid, performed the service; before the fire was a dog, showing his teeth to an old tom cat who was burning his whiskers before the fire. Cardinet admired all that, it made him thirsty and hungry, and drove away the melancholy thoughts engendered by what he had just heard. When he had commenced breakfast he asked the young girl who was serving him.

"Is Coulord there?"

"Yes, sir, he is in the yard, drying his nets, he has just come back from a fishing excursion."

"Tell him there's a glass of wine waiting for him."

"Very good, sir."

The young girl went and told her father, who came in at once, having in one hand a knife, and in the other a lump of brown bread, on which was a bit of fat bacon as white as snow.

"Ah! it's you, sir," said he, sitting down opposite his guest, "you are very good to think of me."

"Just drink a glass of wine."

"With pleasure—your health, sir, and how are you this morning, not tired, I hope—you get up rather early for a Parisian."

"It's true, but I feel quite well."

"The fact is, we had a deal of trouble to catch our man yesterday."

"However, we caught him, and that's everything."

"Ah! but you went ahead, you were not afraid of the water."

"That is just what I came to speak to you about."

"I am at your service, sir."

"You told me he came to your house the previous evening, and that he slept here—only leaving about two o'clock, that is to say, half an hour before us."

"And that is the exact truth, sir."

"Where do you think he came from when he joined us on the rocks?"

"Oh! he had just been taking a walk along the sea-shore; but as he did not know the paths, we got here at least an hour before him."

"Ah! he hadn't been into the town?"

"Certainly not!"

"He was seen with no one in the neighbourhood of Sainte-Barbe?"

"No, sir, I am sure of that, I saw the clerk who closed the chapel half an hour before that, and he told me he saw him alone at the Pointe."

"But he went to Roscoff the previous evening—"

"Yes, before coming here."

"And did he see no one?"

"I have already told you what young Pornéon said, they had brought back a man they had saved from drowning—that's all."

"And did he say nothing here?"

"No, he sat down at the table you see there and did some writing."

"He did some writing—you never told me that."

"Yes, I did, only"—and here the fisherman lowered his voice so as to prevent his daughter hearing him, "I told you it was of no importance, he wrote to one of those women from Paris, who come here to spend a fortnight—a love affair—they gave him that book over there."

The fisherman then got up and handed the poet a blotting-book. Cardinet opened it carelessly, and seeing a sheet of blotting-paper in it, he placed it in such a position before the glass as to be able to read what had been blotted on it.

"That's the very paper he blotted his letter on," said the fisherman.

Cardinet read as follows: "Madame, I have something important to say to you, something requiring the strictest secrecy, kindly be near the rocks of Sainte-Barbe to-morrow, about three o'clock. Pray do not be afraid, this communication is intended for a mother, in the interests of her children."

"Who carried this letter?"

"Young Pornéon."

"It reached its address—and they took it in?"

"Yes, yes, he gave the boy a napoleon when he came back, wet through to the skin."

"And what did he say?"

"I did not hear what he said."

The young girl then came forward blushing and said:

"I heard what he said."

"You heard! Oh! these young girls," said the fisherman laughing, "they've always got their ears open for what they should not hear."

"What did he say, my pretty maid?" asked Cardinet.

"The little dark man you arrested yesterday said to Pornéon: 'Well?'"

"'It's done,' replied the boy."

"'What did she say?' asked the man."

"'She said she would be at the chapel between one and two o'clock,' replied Pornéon. The man then gave him a napoleon."

"Ah ! all is lost !" exclaimed Cardinet dejectedly.

"What do you say ?" asked the fisherman.

"Nothing ! they certainly must have met in the chapel !"

"Why then that rogue of a sexton must have deceived me, those church mice will say anything for a few pence."

Cardinet got up, paid what he owed, and went back to his hotel, to get his portmanteau and catch the diligence. What he had just learnt induced him to go away at once, he felt that everything was known, and that his presence would be useful to his friend. What he was afraid of had happened, and it was the only thing that Bérard considered impossible. Cardinet would have liked to see his friend before the latter met his wife, and that was the reason for his haste. Before leaving, he questioned the hotel people, and was frightened at the importance the simplest things assumed on certain occasions. When he asked whether they had not seen a boy bring a letter for M. Bérard, they replied :

"Not for him, but for his wife, who looked a very sanctimonious person ; she received the letter during the evening and went out to see her—gentleman the next day ; the following day she left her husband to follow her lover—Oh ! those Parisiennes !"

Cardinet could say nothing, it seemed such a probable thing, and this interpretation astounded him. He did not hear the last part of the explanation, for the waiter went away, but not before he had said :

"Of course the lover had followed her down here, they are a nice lot, the fine ladies of the present day !"

Cardinet thought to himself : "Everything is explained, the wretch followed her, wrote the letter, met her outside and sold her his secret for ten thousand francs, the exact sum we found on him. He was then running away to England, having done the trick ! I came too late, I ought to have arrested him the previous evening. He was just about to get into his carriage, when they handed him a telegram, which ran as follows : "M. Cardinet is requested to come to Morlaix, to give evidence respecting the arrest of Lorémont, who carries papers respecting which M. Cardinet can furnish information." "What's up now ?" said Cardinet to himself, anxiously. He drove off in a very primitive carriage, and was shaken up and jolted in a way which prevented all thought of sleep, and gave him time to think over all he had done to prevent what had happened. He arrived at Morlaix station about four o'clock, and taking a cab, drove to the police station. When Cardinet got into the commissary's office, he showed his telegram and was immediately introduced into that functionary's sanctum, feeling very anxious to know why he had been sent for in such great haste. But he was doomed to disappointment, for the commissary said :

"I am very sorry, but I have just received orders to send the prisoner and all papers relating to the case to Paris immediately."

"But might I ask for what reason I was summoned ?"

"Excuse me, sir, but I cannot tell you that. Just see for yourself the last paragraph of the telegram relating to this affair," said the commissary, handing the poet a telegram folded in such a way as to show the following words only : "Keep all details of this case absolutely secret." "I beg you to accept my apology, sir."

"As that's the only thing you have to offer me, I accept," said Cardinet, laughing. The commissary showed him out and he went away, saying to himself : "This is getting very grave. I am anxious to rejoin my poor friend Jacques." Two hours later, he took the train for Paris.

X.

WE must now ask the reader's permission to look back a little. Carried away by the rapid action of this drama, we have related the principal facts, and neglected to unravel the other tangled threads of our story. At Saint-Germain we left in the hands of the police that strange girl who has up to the present been known as Petite. We will now present her in due form, by relating the facts concerning her. A few days after her arrest, Petite was brought up before an investigating magistrate; she was at that moment in a prostrate state, weak and discouraged. Lorémont's departure had quite crushed her. She passed fearful sleepless nights, wondering whether the man she loved had managed to escape, and above all, asking herself what she should say to those who were about to question her. She was in a very feverish state, had a fearful headache, and her poor brain was tortured by a crowd of conflicting thoughts. The magistrate looked at her for a few minutes; Petite lowered her eyes, with the chaste blush of a young girl who feels that some one is gazing at her intently. The magistrate said to her:

"Your name is Claire Boitard, surnamed Petite?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were educated at Saint-Denis?"

"No, sir, in the Rue Barbette."

"Just so, in the Rue Barbette, at the branch establishment of the Saint-Denis School. How is it that after having received a good education, you have made such a bad return for all the trouble that has been taken about you?"

"Whoever took any trouble about me?"

"Those who brought you up."

"I am an orphan, without a relation; on Sundays, when the other girls' parents came to see them, I had no one to see me, I was poor, and brought up amongst girls who were richer than myself, they therefore despised me. No one ever loved me. I have been made what I am by poverty."

"You can tell other people that, but not me. I know all about you."

"I am telling the truth."

"The truth is as follows: Born with bad instincts, a bad disposition set in a charming frame, you gave way to all your worst passions. Brought up as a child above your position, you have recompensed those who gave you that position by accusing them of being the cause of your present mode of life."

"Well?" said she.

"Well! you ran away from school with a disreputable man."

"I loved him!"

"Don't tell me that! You only stopped with him six months."

"It was he who left me, sir. I loved him, and love him still!"

"You love him still—yes, I know that—you love him well enough to get arrested in his stead. Do you know that in choosing thus you were only anticipating the future reserved for you?"

"If it were with him, I should be delighted to know it was the truth!"

The magistrate looked at her in astonishment, so boldly had she pronounced these words.

"So you really love this man?"

Petite nodded and raised her eyes as if to take Heaven as a witness of the truth of her words.

"But, unfortunate girl, do you know what this man is? If we do not stop him he will end his days on the scaffold."

"If he is to die in that way, I would assist him in his crime, so as to be his companion on the scaffold, in order that they might execute us together, and thus enable me to give him one last kiss."

"Is it possible that you love the man to such an extent as this—he is a thief, a swindler."

"But I love him in spite of all that!"

"And that is no doubt why you love him. At Saint-Germain you wanted to follow him, whatever might become of you. Do you know he has been arrested?"

Petite turned pale and looked intently at the magistrate to see if he were deceiving her; but not seeing whether he was or not, she boldly exclaimed:

"Well, so much the better! If you only knew how stale life is to me without him! I am not particular, the greatest happiness I could wish for would be to be imprisoned close to him, to hear him speak, and walk about."

The magistrate listened with astonishment to the declaration of this incomprehensible passion—Love, that delicate flower, was grafted on a nettle, this sunbeam sprung from the mire.

"Ah!" she continued, misinterpreting the magistrate's astonishment. "Ah! if they kill him, I will kill myself; you, who are born rich, do not know what poor people's love is like; they both eat of the same bread, when they have any, and when they have not, they kiss each other to forget their woes. Love is like death, it reduces the poor and rich to the same level. Both become dust through death and both are turned to gold by love. When the poor are tired of finding the cupboard empty—they part."

"And was it poverty that led him to abandon you?"

"Poverty was his excuse. He went into society, made a great many acquaintances, and swore eternal love to all those he met; but he never did that with me, for he knew I should have laughed him to scorn. Unfaithfulness is such a good thing. I do not mean forgetfulness or ingratitude. Every time he was flirting with other women he was thinking of me, and often, in the evening, he silenced them, drew his hand across his forehead, and pronounced my name."

"But this is a strange way of loving!"

"It is a passion which explains to you what I am. I do whatever he tells me."

"Ah! Ah!"

"And I approve everything he does. Yes, I love him, the man you call a thief and a swindler; take him, and keep me with him, or release me and I will rejoin him. I loved him as a child, and love him now that I am a woman. He has a bad disposition, and you are astonished that I should love him all the same. But, sir, you must know that love springs from nothing but hatred. We women are never happier than when we are jealous of our lovers. How often we love a man simply to prevent some other woman from loving him. Besides, I am a strange girl. You abuse Lorémont before me, well, I really believe it is on that account I love him. It's almost stupid to be an honest man, but it's a very difficult thing to be a clever knave, quite different to everyone."

"But you frighten me!" said the astounded magistrate, leaning on the desk with his face in his hands, trying to think in what way he could bring the examination back to the real point. Petite looked at him, shrugged her shoulders, and said:

"That astonishes you, and yet you are an old man; but you have not seen life."

The magistrate raised his head and looked at her with an expression of pity; forgetting he was there to enquire into a case, and absorbed in the study of this singular girl's character, he said:

"And you think you are right, you think that society owes you something, you don't think you have acted wrongly?"

"Sir, I am not a thief, I assure you; it is true I have lived with thieves and seen them steal, but I have never helped them otherwise than by explaining the value of the linen they stole. Why did I do that? because I loved the man who was at the head of affairs."

"But you deceived him with one of the men."

"By his orders."

"But it's shameful."

"You think so."

"I think so!" said the astounded magistrate, unable to understand this perverse nature. "But, unfortunate girl, you must have suffered much before coming to such a pass. However, with your sentiments, you deserve any punishment!"

"Ah! ah! I merit any punishment!" exclaimed the girl in a sardonical tone, "it's your social justice that says that. But what has society done for me?"

"And do you pretend to judge society, you who have rendered yourself unworthy of its protection?"

"You are always reproaching me with my school-days. But before that they left me in the hands of a woman who had been my father's mistress. People used to joke about my father before my face. The neighbours had to send a hundred petitions before I was rescued from this woman's clutches."

"This is sad, but society can do nothing. It is just those who struggle against it who produce such families."

"Society, who wishes to judge me, ought to look after me."

"So you were suffering?"

"As a child I was brought up in the gutter; those who brought me up bought the bread they gave me with the proceeds of their vice, vice which raised a laugh when any one spoke about it at home. The word honour that people are always talking about, is laughed at at home."

"But your father?"

"My father was at the Invalides, he died when I was ten years old. Honour, at home, consisted in being sharp, in deceiving everybody, in getting out of every scrape in a successful way. The woman whom I was accustomed to look upon as my mother considered love as a commonplace affair which unites you one day to separate you the next."

"But this woman was not really your mother?"

"No, sir, I never knew my mother, she died when I was hardly a year old, the woman I am speaking of was my father's mistress."

"But you were living amongst a strange lot, and they are the ones you should condemn."

Petite shrugged her shoulders and continued:

"The book they gave me to read said : First live, everyone for himself, and God for nobody ! When I was a young girl, the most shameful things were carried on before my eyes. The two principal supports, I mean the father and mother, I never had. The man who replaced my father looked upon me exactly as other men did. The woman who was supposed to be my mother told me that though she was not so pretty as I was, she had not remained so long a burden on her parents."

"But this is shocking—it is a regular school of vice. It would be just as praiseworthy to see that children were not brought up carelessly, as to give them a good training later on."

"Yes, sir, for I am not naturally perverse, and it would have sufficed to tell me at that time : 'There is the straight road which leads to where you ought to go.' On the contrary, those whom I was obliged to believe prevented me taking the straight road. If I walked where the road was clean, they pushed me into the mire. At an age when other children are mere infants, poverty and the want of affection had made me a woman. I have acted wrongly, you say, but what man or woman has ever given me a helping hand ? A victim to poverty, I have been obliged to drag through life with this weight at my heels. What was I to do in a world where every hand was raised against me ? snatch by crime what society refused to give me, or live by vice ? I allowed myself to fall into the latter pitfall."

"You have a strange way of justifying your faults—you forget that the great fault of your system is resumed in one word—you were badly brought up, it's true."

"I was not brought up, I was dragged up !"

"Be it so. But you could have saved yourself by working."

Petite hung down her head, but only for a minute, and said :

"Yes, it's true, but I was always very idle !" then resuming she said : "Work or love. Well, love is the very thing that ruined me, though that is the only good and honest sentiment I ever experienced !"

"And you still love ?"

"Still, and I am quite calm, because I know the man I love is not in your hands, as you have just told me."

The magistrate merely smiled, a smile which must have had some purpose, and which deceived Petite, for she exclaimed joyfully :

"Ah ! I knew Lorrémont had not been arrested !"

The magistrate wrote something and rang the bell. The man came in, and he gave him what he had just written, saying : "At once." Petite looked at him anxiously, with knitted brows. She did not feel at ease until the magistrate said :

"Let us revert to our case."

"I am listening to you, sir."

"So you have never assisted this gang of burglars in their work ?"

"Never !"

"You still maintain what you said when first examined, that you were unconsciously acting as a spy on Grosbouléau and Lalongueur."

"That and the valuation of the goods which were brought to me, and carried away immediately."

"These declarations are corroborated by the others," said the man whom Petite took to be an investigating magistrate, but who was only a superior officer of the detective department. After reflecting for a few minutes he said : "My child, you have been more unfortunate than

culpable, let your arrest be a lesson to you, don't have anything more to do with the man who is the cause of all your trouble, and if you wish to avoid being arrested again, settle down and work whilst it is yet time."

On hearing this, Petite's face changed completely. Vicious to the very marrow, she thought she could read in his eyes the reason for his setting her at liberty, and at once said :

"Oh ! sir, you have enlightened me about Lorémont, however much I may have loved him, and whatever it may cost me to do so, I assure you I will never have anything more to do with him. I will rather listen to those who want to help me, and obey them ; and if I am to be released I shall return to my humble lodgings in the Rue Pelée."

"You promise me that ?"

"I promise you faithfully."

"My child, you are free."

"Oh ! thank you, sir, thank you !" said Petite, clapping her hands and running away at once. When she had gone the magistrate rang, and the same man came in.

"Carnier ?"

"He is there."

"Let him come to me at once."

"The man went out and returned immediately with the individual in question."

"Carnier, take two men, and follow this woman night and day, she will put us on Lorémont's track."

"Very good, sir" said Carnier, and he went away at once. The detective who had examined Petite rubbed his hands, saying :—"Those who want to prove too much prove nothing at all ! she is cunning but not clever, she changes too quickly. To-morrow we shall know where the knave is, and perhaps this evening."

XI.

In the Rue Ménilmontant, at the corner of the Rue Folie-Méricourt stood a building serving as a coach-house to a livery-stable keeper ; attached to it was a spacious yard, badly paved and covered with manure. At the further end was the coach-house, flanked on one side by the back room of a wine shop, and on the other by a forage store, near which was the door of a narrow staircase. This door, which seemed to be the entrance to the loft, had no other fastening than an enormous bolt. One knew if any one was inside, for in that case the bolt was drawn back, and the door was fastened inside by a latch. What appeared to be the entrance to a loft, was in reality the entrance to a lodging, a singular lodging, inhabited by a still more singular man whom our readers will shortly recognize. The tenant was at home, for the outside bolt was drawn back, and the door was fastened inside. In order to gain access to the only room which composed this lodging, one had to ascend twenty steps ; enormous steps, like those seen in wind-mills. Having ascended the twenty steps, the visitor came to a glazed door, the glass being daubed over with whitewash. The immense room must have served at one time as a hay loft. Lighted up by a single window, the joints of which, badly made, revealed the fact that they had been procured from some house that had been pulled down. The paperless walls were stained with some grey substance, and the ceiling was crossed

by beams. The greater part of the room was occupied by a drum, through which passed the pipes of a forge which was in the coach-house on the ground floor. This drum formed a sort of partition in the room, and thus made an alcove at the further end. In this alcove was a bed hidden behind large green curtains. In one corner stood a set of pigeon-holes, fifty small compartments on which were inscribed the letters A, Al, B, Bl, and so on, up to the last letter of the alphabet.

To the right, on going in, opposite the drum, was a singular library. On the first shelf were thirty volumes of the "*Gazette des Tribunaux*," and of the "*Droit*" (Law Gazette) since 1836. On the shelf below, were "*Les Crimes Célèbres*" and "*Les Causes Célèbres du dix huitieme Siècle*." On the lower shelf, the Penal Code, and "*Le Bulletin des Lois*." Just opposite the window, was an immense desk, fixed in such a way that the man who sat at it was placed in the shadow of an immense green rep curtain. This unique curtain, which hid the window, was kept back by a single curtain-band near the desk, before which was placed an easy chair. It was in this chair that the master of the office requested his client to sit down, inundating him with light whilst he remained in the shade, and with the exception of the seat occupied by himself, this was the only seat in the room. Close to the drum, was a long sofa, but it was so encumbered with books, newspapers, and other documents, that it was impossible to sit down on it. Everything has a name, and every house its social reason. We had forgotten to say that a brass plate was placed on the door of this strange establishment, bearing the inscription :—MR. REHTIN'S OFFICE. At the moment we enter the office, the master of the place, a little old man, looking quite sixty, in slippers, and a dressing gown, with bald head covered with a skull cap is seated at his desk, going through an immense bundle of papers. After having taken a few notes, he gets up and walks about the room. Yielding to the mania that some people have for talking aloud when they are alone, he walks up and down the room, saying :—

"With their stupid idea of wanting to do everything, they spoil everything, it does not suffice to go a great distance, one must reach the goal; they will ruin him, and get him so low that he won't be able to recover—as they have done for Lorémont. But on the contrary, it is by taking them low and feigning to raise them that one gets a hold on them—we must inspire them with confidence—then, sure of themselves, fearing nothing, certain of occult support, they dare everything and succeed, and we then have men, whilst with their system, they only give us a lot of brigands." M. Rehtin went to the window, looked out into the yard, beating on the window pane with his feverish fingers, and grumbling :—"He won't come yet." He then looked at his watch, stamped his feet impatiently and said :—"He told me three o'clock, it is now nearly four, and he is not here—they have probably done some stupid thing—Ah ! did I not want to save him, I would soon send all these people about their business !" And M. Rehtin walked up and down, still continuing his monologue :—

"This man whom I would like to have, whose capture I had planned, has been allowed by them to escape, and they arrested this useless, idiotic girl in his stead." All at once there was a knock, M. Rehtin ran to the window, to see who it was, and immediately exclaimed :—"At last, 'tis he !" He went downstairs, undid the door, and introduced the visitor into his office. When they were seated, M. Rehtin said :—

"Well ?"

"Well, I've plenty of news."

"Good?"

"Excellent."

"Ah! tell me all about it!" said Rehtin, placing himself closer to his visitor and adding:—"I am listening."

"If I am late, it is on that account—we have got him!"

"You have arrested him!" cried Rehtin, jumping up.

"No, no, not yet, but we shall have him soon."

M. Rehtin sat down again, disappointed, and shaking his head said:—

"Always promises—it isn't much—cases that last so long are never much good. However, tell me what has taken place."

"Yesterday I examined this Claire Boitard whom people call Petite, and told you what came of it, whilst she thought she was deceiving me, she was, as I told you, the dupe of my looks, of my pretended admiration for her, and attributed to her personal charms the liberty I accorded to her. In order to confirm this idea in her mind, and knowing that she was not at home, I called last night at her house in the Rue Pelée, and left word that the person who was interesting himself in her would call again. Of course they did not fail to tell her I had been, and to describe me to her. Thoroughly deceived, and quite certain I am in love with her, she sent me word that she should expect me in two days' time. Then, convinced of my duplicity, and consequently of her impunity, no longer afraid of being pursued, she has this morning set off in search of Lorémont."

"How do you know that?"

"By the report of a detective who came to the Prefecture at three o'clock. She went to his lodgings in the Rue Duphot, then to Saint-Germain, and finally came back to Paris, where she dined with a second-hand clothes dealer, Madame Chaineau. There she found two letters for her; she will certainly reply to them, and as she is being closely watched, her replies will be handed to me."

"All that is better, but it's very slow."

"And it is also very difficult."

After reflecting for a few minutes, M. Rehtin took certain notes from the dossier and said to the man:—

"You must have Cardinet followed night and day, and send me every morning a full report of his movements. You will also set a close watch on a young woman who calls herself Jeanne de Sillac, and who lives in furnished lodgings in the Rue des Martyrs, in a house belonging to Belida."

"Belida? Ah! I know."

"I shall want a report about Jeanne every morning."

The detective wrote these instructions down and asked:—

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all—have you no written reports?"

"Yes, sir, here they are," said the detective, getting up and handing Rehtin certain papers he took from his pocket-book. He was about to say something else when M. Rehtin said:—

"I will return at six o'clock, if you have anything fresh, let me have it immediately."

The detective bowed and retired. Left alone, the master of this singular office sat down at his desk and read the reports he had just received. An hour later, the singular personage went out, elegantly dressed, looking quite a different man, jumped into a private brougham waiting for him in the Place des Filles-du-Calvaire, and ordered the coachman to drive "home."

In a few minutes the carriage stopped before the office of Bérard and Co. The man known as M. Rehtin in the Rue Ménilmontant, walked into Bérard and Co.'s office, and all the clerks got up and bowed respectfully. He went into the cashier's office, sat down near the accountant, and checked the previous day's business; after having carefully examined the various accounts, reports, etc., he said to the accountant :

"Have you any letters?"

"No, sir, nothing except the business correspondence."

"Nothing from Roscoff?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Very good," said the little old man, going away and taking a turn through the shop, the offices, and the yard; then after satisfying himself that everything was going on all right, he returned to his desk and wrote the following letter: "My dear Jacques: Be quite easy, everything is going on all right, I am looking after the business. You are nearly at the end of your sufferings, the wretch who has been the cause of them will soon be placed in a position where he cannot hurt you. The business is going on well, so you can enjoy your forced holiday—You have nothing to fear now—Nither." Having signed this letter he put it in an envelope, and wrote the address: "M. Jacques Bérard, Poste Restante, Roscoff." That done, M. Nither, for it was he, went out and posted the letter.

XII.

SAINTÉ-PÉLAGIE is the democratic prison *par excellence*; all are equal, thieves, forgers, people of doubtful character, and journalists who have dared to speak their minds too freely about the members of the Government—the various prisoners being simply separated from one another by an iron railing. In the immense court-yard reserved for the thieving fraternity, the day being very fine, the prisoners were seated on the benches in groups, warming themselves in the midday sun. The two representatives of the firm of Grosboubleau, Lalongueur, and Co. were walking together. All at once Grosboubleau looked intently at a prisoner who got up at their approach.

"It seems to me I've seen that individual before somewhere," said he.

"Oh! I know I've seen that head on a body of some one I know."

"But it's Gustave!"

"Yes, so it is, it's Gustave," said Lalongueur, then he added: "But what Gustave?"

"You know very well, the waiter at the Peau de Lapin."

"It's quite true!"

"How pleased I am to see you!" exclaimed Gustave, wagging his head.

"You'll see a lot of friends here."

"Ah," said Grosboubleau, "but we don't want to associate with anyone."

"Ah! you are right, one meets such a strange lot of people in these prisons."

"People that one would not associate with outside," added Lalongueur.

"But how is it you are in here, M. Grosboubleau, and you, M. Lalongueur?"

"Oh, all a lot of gossip."

"Political affairs," added Grosboubleau.

"I thought this was not the political side!"

"There's no more room on the other side, the place is crammed with journalists."

"Don't talk to me about them," said Lalongueur, "those people would monopolise Mazas as well, if they were allowed to do so."

"And you?" asked Grosbouleau in a patronising tone, conscious of his superiority.

"Oh! an injustice—You know me: am I a thief?"

"Certainly not, you are a café waiter."

"Certainly," added Lalongueur, "he can't take up all sorts of trades."

"Well, I don't say I've not been one—but it was when I started in life."

"Who hasn't been one in his time?"

"More or less."

"Every one."

"Evidently," said the two chums.

"In short, the other day, I was walking past a picture shop, I don't know how it happened, but my stud caught in the chain of a gentleman that was passing—"

"Of course it was an accident."

"He roared out: Stop thief!"

"What, for such a trifling thing!" exclaimed Lalongueur, in astonishment.

"You can quite understand the effect this cry produced on me."

"It's very natural. Even if you happen to be a thief, you don't like people to tell you of it."

"Especially in the street, before other people," added Lalongueur.

"Just so, I naturally blushed!"

"For shame!"

"That's exactly the effect it produces on me," said Lalongueur.

"Well," continued Gustave, "I simply put my hand over his mouth in order that people should not hear a word which might damage my reputation."

"That's all we have to live on, our reputation," said Grosbouleau.

"Certainly! and they arrested me for that!"

"You don't say so!"

"It's as true as I stand here—and do you know what this bloated citizen said?"

"No."

"Well, M. Grosbouleau, and you, M. Lalongueur, you will just see whether humanity deserves the trouble we take for them, and whether it's not enough to disgust any honest man."

"What did he say?"

"He said I had hold of his chain and that it was broken."

"But had you got hold of it?"

"Well, I had and I had not—in order to put my hand over his mouth, I was naturally obliged to detach the chain from my stud, and I held it with one hand—but I was only holding it, I was not stealing it."

"Yes, I quite understand."

"But that's not all! the scamp said I did not intend to prevent him calling out, but to strike him in the face, that I had even broken two of his teeth. And the unfortunate part of the affair is the magistrate believed him—Ah! my friends, what strange times we do live in."

"But he's a scoundrel, this citizen!" exclaimed Lalongueur indignantly.

"Oh, I shall always remember his name, a man called Fontaine."

Grosbouleau put his finger to his forehead, as if trying to recall something. All at once he said: "Article 383. Robberies committed in the

public streets are punished with penal servitude, if they are committed with violence, &c. In other cases, the penalty will be solitary confinement. You will have ten years, my boy."

"But unfortunately, I have already been condemned for a similar thing."

"Really!"

"He's a real gourmand," said Lalongueur.

Grosboubleau, making another effort of memory, said: "Article 56. Whoever, having been condemned to prison, shall be found guilty of a crime punishable with solitary confinement, will be condemned to penal servitude for the second offence."

"Poor Gustave!" exclaimed Lalongueur, taking his hand.

"Oh, you need not pity me," said Gustave, disdainfully, "I am not sorry, I am thoroughly disgusted with society now!"

"Good-bye, my friend," said Grosboubleau, "we will leave you now, as we have to prepare our defence."

They were about to resume their promenade, when a turnkey came and took them back to prison. There he conducted the two partners, who were visibly anxious, to an immense room painted in dark red, lighted up by a single window, an immense window with small panes, looking out on the Rue de la Clef, and protected by enormous iron bars.

The furniture was very simple, a chair and a desk. As they had not yet lighted up, and it was getting dark, the immense room was simply lighted by the wood fire crackling in the fireplace—this room had a sinister look—a shiver ran through the frames of the two knaves, who held each other by the hand, as if to give themselves courage. The man whom we have already seen examine Petite was seated at the desk, going through a bundle of papers. Embarrassed, anxious, not knowing what was going on, the two burglars waited for the man at the desk to raise his head. Lalongueur winked at his friend, pointed to the detective, and seemed to say: "If all those papers are about us, we are booked for some time." Grosboubleau, on the contrary, held down his head. Feeling the melancholy impression of the room in which he was standing he thought to himself, "After all, would it not be better for me to be in prison than to continue the style of life I have been leading? Petite is free without my help, the little darling is happy, and has probably returned to work. It was my fault that she was arrested." The unfortunate man really thought this was the case. He also thought he had known Petite almost as a child! When he was in her company, and thought he had her all to himself he lorded it over her, treating her disdainfully, but this was a comedy he played to deceive other people. The fact is, Grosboubleau lived in a class of society where the men are proud of domineering over the women, and consider they are proving their superiority when despising the sacrifices a woman makes for them. Grosboubleau would never lower himself to display the affection he felt for Petite. This reserve was practised before other people, but when they were alone, the wretch was literally at Petite's feet, and was intoxicated by the commonplace smile that she always had on her lips. The embarrassment, awkwardness, and shame she felt for him were simply taken by the knave as so many proofs of the love she felt for him. The relations existing between the pair may be described by the well-known verse by Boileau:

"Humble slave at home—insolent abroad!"

But at bottom he worshipped Claire Boitard, and suffered greatly from

his inability to see her. He consoled himself for being arrested with his accomplice, because he could talk to him about Petite. Lalongueur always agreed with what Grosboubleau said, so that when the latter asked him whether he thought Petite was in safety, Lalongueur assured him she was saved, and used every means in his power to prove to him that she had extricated herself from the cruel position in which she had been placed. The detective raised his head at a sign from Lalongueur which meant, "Look out, we are being looked out." Grosboubleau went up to the desk, and looked at the detective, who was furtively gazing at him.

"Which is Grosboubleau?"

"That's my name, sir," said Grosboubleau with a smile, which anyone but Lalongueur would have taken for a grimace. "Ugène Grosboubleau, sir."

"But that is not your real name!"

"That's true, sir," said the rascal, twisting his cap about in his hands, "it's a sobriquet."

"Why did you change your name?"

"Well, sir, you know what we are; when we are young, we are careless, stupid, and do a great many wrong things, but all the same we have to think of our family, and save our name from disgrace."

"But what is your real name?"

"My real name, my father's name, is Merlandier."

"But there's a man of that name who was sentenced to five years."

"Ah! sir, that must be a younger branch of the family. We are all as pure as gold. What a misfortune for the family."

"You have never been punished?"

"No, sir, except at school. Never since."

"What trade are you?"

"I am a day labourer, and do anything."

"Anything you are asked to do?"

"Yes, anything honest, of course."

"Very good," said the detective turning his attention to Lalongueur; who, as upright as a post, with eyes wide open, was waiting his turn to be examined.

"And you, what's your name?"

"I was baptised by the name of Adolphe, sir, but as I thought it was a stupid name, I took that of Victor, but people always call me by my nickname."

"But I ask you your name."

"Ah! yes, the name I am known by, Lalongueur, it isn't pretty, but you know what it is, people give me this *sobrickey* on account of my stature."

"But what is your real name?"

"My real name is—Poulard!"

"Poulard. He was condemned."

"To death, yes, sir, that's papa!" said Lalongueur, drawing himself up with a proud look. "People can say nothing against him, he conducted himself very well; after all, you know the affair broke his heart; people are often calumniated in the Law Courts, it hurt his feelings, and he was disgusted with life, he was—"

"But I tell you there was a Poulard condemned to four years' imprisonment."

"Four years, a M. Poulard, it's very funny, perhaps the name is not spelt in the same way, there's a *d* at the end of mine."

"Why did you change your name?"

"But I have never changed my name."

"But you call yourself Lalongueur."

"On my chance of Paradise I assure you I do not."

"But you are trifling with me."

"Sir," said Lalongueur, placing himself familiarly close to the detective, and moving the books about in a careless way, "you misunderstand me; if people call me Adolphe, I answer, if they call me Poulard, I reply to that name too, but on account of my stature they call me Lalongueur, I cannot get angry with my comrades for that, I am an honest fellow, and you may be sure I have nothing to be ashamed of."

"What is your profession?"

"Like Uguène, sir; we are partners."

"What! partners! day labourers!"

"Yes, sir, ask Uguène."

Grosboubleau now thought it his duty to interfere.

"Yes, sir, I am in partnership with my friend, and we undertake together work that would be too fatiguing for one man."

"What sort of work?"

"All sorts."

"How! all sorts. Tell me exactly what!"

"Furniture moving, for instance."

"In short you can neither of you give any account of yourselves since your discharge."

"Since our discharge!" repeated Grosboubleau, looking at his companion as if to ask him whether he understood what the man meant.

"Discharge from where?" asked Lalongueur.

"You have no book or certificate testifying that you have been engaged in any work that has brought you in wages enough to live on."

"Sir, I am not ashamed to say that I am a Bohemian, and live from hand to mouth. The future belongs to Heaven!"

"The future belongs to Heaven!" repeated Lalongueur, who thought it a noble phrase.

The detective looked at the two knaves for a moment and said:

"You know the reason of your arrest."

"I, sir, no, I've not the slightest idea," said Grosboubleau, with great dignity; "nothing in my conduct has called for such a step."

"We have no special political opinion, we are always in favour of the reigning dynasty; I can assure you of that. Should the Government change, we are ready to support the new order of things."

The detective gazed intently at Lalongueur, who at once put an end to his profession of faith.

"Enough of this trifling," said the detective. "You are accused of participating in the robbery on the Ile de la Grand Jatte."

"And you take us for burglars!" exclaimed the two friends, getting closer to one another. Never had an honest but calumniated man protested in a more natural way, the tone, the attitude and gestures of the two rascals were so well assumed that the detective himself raised his head to make sure he was not mistaken. Grosboubleau continued: "Burglars! never, when men begin to succeed in life, there are always envious people ready to calumniate them."

"That's the worst of being in business!" exclaimed Lalongueur.

"Eugène Merlandier," said the detective, "you and Poulard are guilty of breaking into an inhabited house on the Ile de la Grand Jatte."

"It's false !" protested the two men, simultaneously.

"You have, as members of a gang, led by Lorémont, plundered this house, and taken the stolen goods away in two boats."

"Oh ! sir, pray go no further, you have been deceived, your informant has mingled truth with fiction."

"Explain yourself then."

"Well," said Lalongueur, "a man called Lorémont came to our house in the Rue Pelée, and told us that he wanted to move out of his country house. We settled on a price with him, forty francs, and did the work the same evening. That's the truth."

"The whole truth !" said Grosbouleau.

"The real truth is as follows : you belong to a gang of individuals commanded by Lorémont ; for the last two years you have been plundering all the country houses in the suburbs of Paris. You sell the large things to a man called Lanout, and the linen to a woman named Chaineau. The police have been watching you for some time. On the Ile de la Grande Jatte, you were assisted by Claire Boitard, surnamed Petite. Lorémont directed your movements ; you broke into an inhabited house by night."

"But it was daylight !" roared Lalongueur, forgetting himself.

Grosbouleau glared at his imprudent friend, and clenched his fist.

"Ah ! you have just betrayed yourself !" exclaimed the detective.

"Nothing of the kind, sir, nothing of the kind, I say that when we did the moving, it was not dark. The Baron de Lorémont, for that is his name, deceived us ; who can you trust, if noblemen begin to deceive poor people ? The baron had forgotten his key, and we could never have found a locksmith on the Island. We had to jump over the wall ; I assure you our intentions were quite honest, we went there to work."

"Who do you think you are imposing on ?" asked the detective.

"Monsieur," said Grosbouleau, "there is one thing we had forgotten. Perhaps Lorémont as you call him, was a clever knave ; he may have said to himself : 'Here are two simple fellows, I shall be able to do what I like with them ;' he must therefore have deceived us and told us this tale about moving from a country house of his and taken us into a house that did not belong to him ; and thus made us plunder instead of move out of a house. But that was not our intention. I tell you we are *bona fide* working men, and not burglars."

"Thank God !" added Lalongueur ; "you can enquire about us in the neighbourhood where we live and of people who know us."

"That's what has been done."

"Ah !" said the two partners, with a grimace which showed what little confidence they had in this inquiry.

"We must put an end to this," said the detective, "do you insist on denying your participation in the burglary on the Ile de la Grande Jatte ?"

"I deny it ! I deny it !" exclaimed the two men simultaneously.

"Very good. You will have to explain how you came by the articles you sold to Mr. Lanout."

"Ah ! good heavens !" exclaimed Grosbouleau, "the old man has been caught."

Lalongueur, feeling very awkward, looked at his friend, and said :

"We moved the goods from a house on the island. The baron was to come and meet us, but as he did not come to pay us, we were obliged to sell the articles."

"You were well paid for your work, you got five hundred francs."

"Ah ! but we were very careful."

"In short, you took the articles away and appropriated them, the court will decide as to the value of your declarations. We must put an end to this," said the detective, ringing. The turnkey came in followed by two of his colleagues, and took the prisoners away. At a sign from the detective, they separated the two prisoners. A few minutes afterwards, Grosbouleau was again brought before the detective, who said :—

"Merlandier, I have sent for you again because I do not think you are exactly an imbecile. Now that you are alone, I hope you will abandon the ridiculous system you have adopted up to the present. You have not yet been delivered up to justice. It is my duty to decide on your fate, and if, as I believe, you are an intelligent man, we might perhaps look over the charge on which you have been brought here."

Grosbouleau looked at the agent, with gaping mouth, and eyes wide open, asking himself what the detective could be aiming at, and said :—"I don't understand what you mean at all."

"You are a sharp man, and will soon understand what I mean. I am ready to believe that the real culprit in this affair is Lorémont. I am ready to believe that, but justice must be satisfied, and we must find this man ; we must find some one who has worked under his orders, one of the oldest of the gang, who knows his ways, the places he frequents, and the people he meets ; this man must act with us, and keep a good look out for him. Do you understand me ?"

"I think I do," said Grosbouleau, smiling, and nodding his head.

"Do you know the man who could do this for us ?"

"I think so," said Grosbouleau, "I know a man who has often said to himself : the day I can play a trick on him I will do it with pleasure. I know one who loves him as the devil loves holy water, and who would ask you nothing further than to facilitate his researches."

"Well," said the detective, "they will now take you back to your cell. Reflect on what I have just said to you. We will shut our eyes to a great many things ; if the man we speak about is prepared to devote his energies to the work, and do his duty ; we will send for him this evening, and he will receive a note explaining what he has to do."

"Very good, sir," said Grosbouleau, bowing respectfully.

The turnkey who had introduced him, took him to the Record Office instead of back to his cell, and after waiting there half an hour, a letter was put into Grosbouleau's hands. This letter ran as follows : "Every day at six o'clock, you will hand in a report of what you have done during the day to M. Rehtin, at the corner of the Rue Ménilmontant and the Rue Folie-Méricourt. On handing in the report, you will receive four francs." Grosbouleau was delighted at this good fortune, and the turnkey having opened the door, said to him : "Eugène Merlandier, you are free." As soon as Grosbouleau got outside, he ran straight to the Rue Pelée, but on turning round once or twice, he said to himself : "Ah, ah, I must be careful, I am being watched." On arriving in the Rue Pelée he inquired after Petite, and was delighted to hear that though she had gone out she was coming back that evening. Petite was not arrested. "Now," said Grosbouleau to himself, "I must not displease these people, and will, therefore, set about my work—I must find him."

As Grosbouleau never lost his head, he reflected for a few minutes, and commenced his researches by going to pay a visit to M. Rehtin. There he found in the porter's lodge a small packet addressed to him, containing a

ten franc piece. Agreeably surprised, he said to himself: "How well all this is arranged." He then took the omnibus for Montparnasse, and an hour afterwards, entered the "Peau de Lapin." On going in he was astonished to perceive his old friend Lalongueur, who was sitting in his usual place. The two friends chinked glasses joyfully, and, after a few minutes conversation, were surprised to find they were both charged with the same mission.

"You see," said Lalongueur, "really honest men always obtain work in the long run."

XIII.

FOR the reader's sake we were obliged to go back into the past as we have done. We will now return to the road between Morlaix and Paris where we left our hero Jacques Bérard. After having carefully reflected on what had happened, Jacques concluded that if his wife had left Roscoff so suddenly, it was because she was tormented by jealousy, engendered by this story about Linotte. Had his wife known about his past life, he felt sure she would not have assumed this attitude. The poor fellow was not therefore really uneasy, knowing as he did, that he could easily prove to her that even if he had been somewhat fast during his single days, he had always remained faithful to her since his marriage. Alone in the compartment, nestling in the corner, Bérard meditated on what had happened; his eyes following the ever-changing panorama that seemed to be unrolled before him. The train was going along at a rapid rate; the trees bent and made, as it were, respectful curtsies; the clouds sped along in the dull, heavy sky, and the houses seemed to totter on their foundations.

The train from Brittany, joining the express at Le Mans, is very often nothing but a parliamentary train. Hence it happens that one has sometimes to wait hours to catch the express; and that's what happened to Bérard. They came and told him that he would have to wait four hours for the Paris train. He therefore took a walk through the town, as the express did not leave till ten minutes past seven; he dined and then returned to the station. At seven o'clock he was getting into his compartment when he heard some one calling him. Turning round, he found it was Cardinet, who had just alighted from a Brittany train.

"What! it's you already?"

"Yes," said Cardinet; "to remain alone at Roscoff would be more than being buried alive."

"Well, get in, I am alone in this compartment."

"Excuse me, you are too quick."

"What do you want to do?"

"But, my friend, I want to study still life."

"I don't understand you."

"I don't live on poetry alone. In the first place, people starve on it as a rule; witness Chatterton, Malfilâtre, Gilbert—"

"Yes, yes, I know; but I don't understand what you mean."

"And yet it's very simple; I want to see the spot where the buffet stands."

"How stupid you are!"

"What a curious thing we should both have the same opinion about each other."

"But the train is about to start."

"All the more reason for making haste."

"But you are not going to dine?"

"No ; I am going to procure some provisions—a chicken, etc."

"Make haste."

"Come with me," said Cardinet, "if the train starts I should not like to stay here alone."

"That's kind !"

"In the first place, I have a great many things to tell you."

"Grave things ?" asked his friend, following him to the buffet.

"Not yet, but they may become so."

"You frighten me !"

"That's stupid !"

"What, again ?"

"Excuse me, but you began it. You quite understand," continued he, not wishing to frighten Bérard, "that if it were grave, I should not be so calm."

"Be quick, there's the whistle."

"It's probably because some one has told the engine-driver there's a poet in the train."

Cardinet then bought some food, and two bottles of wine, and got into the train with his friend. It was quite time, for it was on the move.

XIV.

DURING the four hours' journey, Cardinet concealed his anxiety from his friend. Not being certain the revelation had been made to Madame Bérard, he did not want to cause his friend any premature pain. He had undertaken not to abandon him ; to stay with him and afford him his support, to console him, and above all, advise him, should his wife have learnt all. He had read the letter addressed by the baron to Madame Bérard, but the rapidity with which the events had followed one another, since that evening, warranted him in hoping that the revelation had only been incompletely made. But what Cardinet wanted above all, was not to quit his friend. It was a loyal and substantial friendship which existed between Cardinet and Bérard, ever since they had first met in the galleys. Cardinet had been sent there for some political crime, and had heard Bérard give a sincere, straightforward account of the crime for which he had been condemned. His regrets, his remorse, had proved to him that the unfortunate man was not a scoundrel, and that he had only become a criminal by yielding to a fit of madness. An amnesty had restored Cardinet to liberty, and he was subject to no police superintendence. As soon as Bérard was pardoned and came to Paris, he had helped him to settle down there ; and in fact, saw him nearly every day. Cardinet liked Bérard, and Bérard esteemed Cardinet. The poet feared a catastrophe, and wanted to be there to strengthen his friend, to sustain him, and give him courage to make a struggle. He knew how weak the flesh was, and that in a fit of despair his friend might be led to commit some fault, perhaps a crime. He therefore determined not to lose sight of him.

"Jacques," said he, certain that his friend would refuse, "don't you think the food sold at the buffets is too digestive ?"

"I don't understand you."

"I have eaten half a chicken and some ham, and feel as if I were just as hungry as ever."

"What ? you are hungry !" exclaimed Jacques, laughing.

"Just so!"

"You have a light heart!"

"No, but my stomach—"

As Bérard simply smiled, Cardinet said:

"What! you don't understand what I mean yet?"

"Certainly not."

"We will jump into a cab, and in half an hour shall be at Brébant's."

"Not at all; we should get a bad supper at the restaurant."

"A bad supper! at Paul's!"

"Listen, Cardinet; you must understand how anxious I am to get back home."

"Why is that?"

"What do you mean, why? Simply because I want to know the reason of Aimée's flight."

"But you know it."

"I know it—that is to say I suppose—"

"Well, all that is of no importance," said Cardinet, narrowly watching his friend, as he pronounced the words.

"That is not of much importance; and yet however good and yielding I may be, I don't intend to allow things to go on like that. If at the least thing—the slightest gossip about me—the merest tale—my wife wants to leave me, I shall have to call her to order. The first movement is an excuse, when having done wrongly one thinks no more about it, but such a rapid and grave determination, for such a simple—"

"My dear Jacques, you know I have always given you good advice. If you will believe me, you will not attach any undue importance to your wife's departure—it's a proof of love—"

"A proof of love to run away from the man she loves."

"But you don't feel any doubt as to the sincerity of your wife's affection for you, do you?"

"Certainly not; and I am proving it by wanting to put an end to this childishness. You know what an important subject my mind is taken up with just now—"

"Don't speak about that; it's all over and forgotten,"—and Cardinet gazed intently at his friend—then resuming in a careless tone, he said: "And even should your past life be brought up against you—" Jacques looked up at his friend who continued—"which is hardly possible now, thank God! what do you think can happen? However, take the worst view of the case: Madame Bérard is not only your wife, she is the mother of your children, and the latter would form an indissoluble chain between you."

Bérard remained silent—with fixed eye, he was thinking of what Cardinet had said, and thought he could see his wife as she was learning about his past! It would be an impossible life, a permanent misfortune, whatever Cardinet might say, and probably lead to a separation between himself and Aimée—he would in short have to commence life again. And at this idea, he felt himself giving way, and saw no escape except by death. Cardinet was watching him, and could nearly guess, by the wrinkles in his forehead, and the contraction of his mouth, what was going on in the poor fellow's mind. He now felt afraid himself, and tried to think what he could do in presence of a catastrophe which he did not think would happen, but which however his reason led him to dread. The first thing to be done was to snatch Bérard from this fixed idea, and he said in a careless tone:

"I came to rejoin you because you said I was an ungrateful fellow to let you go away alone—now that I have satisfied your whim, you will leave me at the railway station like so much heavy luggage."

"My dear Cardinet, you know how anxious I am, come with me to supper, you are no stranger in my house."

"But that's just the reason; were I a stranger, you would be reserved, whilst on the contrary, notwithstanding the tragical way you look at this matter it is simply a family affair between you and your wife, springing from the latter's jealousy. Her dignity obliged her to go away with her children, and to leave a watering-place where her husband had made an appointment with a woman—I know that scene; it is amusing at a theatre, when one is seated in a fauteuil, but not at the table between monsieur and madame. I should be the mutual friend and used as a racket for serving the balls. 'He has done this, he has done that,' says madame, 'and I take you as a judge, M. Cardinet.' 'No, excuse me, she is a school friend, Cardinet knows her and will tell you so.' 'Oh! the horror! M. Cardinet knows her! Ah! M. Cardinet I thought you were a friend of the family,' and so on and so forth. Bérard, I am your friend, I am hungry, and want to sup comfortably without getting indigestion—I am prepared to go with you somewhere else, and to see you home afterwards. That's all I can do for you!" Bérard looked at his friend, feeling sure the latter would never deceive him, for whenever he, Bérard, had been threatened by the spectre of his past life Cardinet had always been the first to help and comfort him. He was, therefore, greatly relieved to hear the poet talking like this and said:—

"Very good! The fact is that wishing to prevent such a thing from happening in the future, I am going to talk very severely to Aimée."

"That would be another piece of folly! my friend, do not address any reproach to your wife. The force of inertia is the best thing—wait and you will see her come back to you, and it will be she who will ask your pardon." The train just then ran into the station and Cardinet continued:

"We will go and sup at Brébant's."

"Very good, as you insist on it, but you will have to see me home."

"That's understood."

The two friends got into a cab and drove to the Boulevard Montmartre. On arriving at the restaurant, they went up on to the first floor. Cardinet asked for a pencil, ostensibly for writing down what they wanted. He really did this, but wrote underneath the order—"send a messenger to the Rue d'Enghien, to Messrs. Bérard's, and tell him to ask the door-porter whether M. and Madame Bérard have returned, and get a written answer." He gave the card to the head-waiter, and said, "Philippe, I recommend to your attention what is written at the bottom, and that in a very special manner." The waiter read the card and notified by a significant glance that it should be done.

"What did you write on that card?"

"Something I like, and which they are going to make specially for me."

"Gourmand!"

"Ah! Dumas is not the only man who discovers good things! I have already invented the Cardinet grog, you shall taste it one of these days. This evening you are going to try the Cardinet kidneys, with a sauce that will astonish you," said the poet, smacking his lips. They had a fairly merry supper, and had nearly finished when Philippe made a sign to

Cardinet which meant : "Come out, your answer has arrived." Cardinet got up, and the messenger handed him the letter, unnoticed by Bérard.

"Who wrote that?"

"A clerk who was playing cards with the doorkeeper."

"A clerk belonging to the firm?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did they not ask who sent you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what did you say?"

"I said nothing, but simply gave him ten francs."

"That's quite right! here they are," said Cardinet, putting a napoleon into his hand.

He then opened the letter and read as follows :—"Madame Bérard arrived alone yesterday; she made up several parcels and went away to her parents, who came yesterday to look over the accounts. M. Fontaine had an altercation with M. Nither, and said that in three days' time he should take the management of the business, in the name of his daughter and her children. M. Nither did not ask him why, but went away at once. It is feared that M. Bérard is dead." When Cardinet returned to the table, he was so pale that Bérard anxiously asked him what was the matter. Cardinet sat down beside his friend, took his hand in his and said :

"Bérard, you must have courage."

"What do you mean?"

"We are in a public place, no cries, no disturbance, be calm—you have suffered—you are strong—read that." And he handed him the letter he had just received. Jacques took it, and glanced at it rapidly. The effect produced was exactly like the shock of an electric current; his hands trembled, and the letter fell from his fingers, but the poor fellow's eyes were still riveted on it. A livid paleness spread over his face, the perspiration rolled down his cheeks, his mouth was drawn up, and he felt an icy current running through his whole frame. But Bérard was a strong man, and was always on his guard against Fate—though the shock was terrible, he received it like a man, and Cardinet alone could see the effect it had produced on him. The poet pressed his hands as if to say : "I am with you!" Jacques made no reply to this; he was not vanquished, he was tired, and was resting. But he was gradually becoming discouraged, and remained several minutes quite unconscious of where he was—he was no longer the successful man, the happy father, the wealthy tradesman—he was No. 71, the galley slave! the murderer of the Bridge of l'Estacade. All his horrible past life sprang up before him—as if he was suffering from some terrible hallucination. Suddenly he started up and pointed to the Algerian curtains hanging at the door. Cardinet knew this physical phenomenon, his friend's brain was reeling from the shock. Like a drunken man he was about to give vent to his complaints by evoking his past life! The poet therefore sent the waiters away, attributing his friend's state to the wine, and saying : "Leave me alone with him, a terrible illness he has just recovered from has left its marks on him—something like a moral epilepsy, it's nothing, but leave me alone with him." The waiters immediately rushed out, and Cardinet locked the door; it was quite time for, putting his head forward, and staring wildly at the door curtains which were still shaking, Bérard cried out :

"There he is—there he is—he has just disclosed everything."

"What's the matter?" asked Cardinet.

"Don't you see his head behind the curtains! his hair standing on end, and his face covered with blood and mud?"

"Who? Come, Bérard, be reasonable, sit down and drink a glass of water," said Cardinet, wetting his napkin in order to refresh his friend's temples; but the latter, drawing back into a corner of the room, gasped out:

"Le Charpentier! there he is! It's he who has told everything! Drive him away, he's coming towards me! Don't you see his maimed hand? he is covering his face with blood—see how it is running down him!"

"Wait, wait," said Cardinet terrified, "I will drive him away!"

And he went close to his friend, who at once calmed down. He breathed heavily, drew his hand over his forehead, which was streaming with perspiration, threw back his hair, and tried to drive away the lugubrious thoughts which crowded his brain. Cardinet was afraid brain fever would set in, and dipping his napkin into some iced champagne, he again tried to apply it to his friend's burning forehead, saying: "You are very hot, just wet your temples." Bérard jumped up and drew back. Cardinet, knitting his brows, said to himself; "He is afraid of water, it's madness." Jacques, whose eyes were sparkling with a feverish light, was still drawing back before an invisible phantom, and pointing to the window with a furious gesture. "There he is! there he is again! he is making grimaces at me and showing his teeth! go away! go away! he's putting his head forward! a serpent's neck—he's going to bite me!" In spite of himself, Cardinet looked round, Jacques had said this with such a terrible accent—seeing nothing, he ran towards the unfortunate man, who, still drawing back, stood up against the fireplace, in which there was still a small fire burning.

"I am here, Jacques," said he, "fear nothing. Where is he?"

"There," said the poor fellow, pointing to the window.

On seeing his friend in this state, Cardinet had at once opened the window, and closed the Algerian curtains, which were feebly agitated by the night wind. Cardinet said:

"What a stupid you are, it's the wind!"

"No, I can see him!"

"You see him! Who?"

"Le Charpentier!"

"Where?"

"Just between the curtains."

"Between the curtains!" exclaimed Cardinet, looking first at Jacques and then towards the window, fearing that the unfortunate man had really gone mad this time.

"Yes, there between the two curtains. Don't you see him? He is hideous, a pale green, his beard has grown and his eyes are hollow! Do you see his forehead knocked in by the blow of the fist I gave him? The blood is running, and making a stream. Oh! the blood, the blood! it's a torrent falling on me. Ah! it's burning my feet!"

Cardinet took the unfortunate man in his arms, for he was fainting away, carried him to the sofa, and stood over him, feeling that if he allowed these hallucinations to last much longer, Bérard would certainly go mad. It was therefore necessary that he should put a stop to these visions, no matter how. It was the idea of his present life being ruined, broken up, which recalled this fantastic vision of the past, Cardinet was therefore anxious to put an end to this painful scene as soon as possible.

"Don't be afraid, Jacques, I am here, the fever is showing you things that do not exist. Give me your hand ; get up !"

Jacques obeyed, and Cardinet could feel that the unfortunate man's hand was trembling.

"Now look at me. Do you still see him ?"

"Yes," replied Jacques, in a sharp tone, with his eyes fixed on the curtains.

"You see him ?"

"Yes, he's looking at me !"

"What's he doing ?"

"Showing his teeth."

"Is he moving ?"

"No, he is now showing me his hands. Oh ! it's frightful ! his fingers are cut—it was not me, it was she who did it."

"Fear nothing, Jacques. Is he still there ?"

"Yes !" gasped Bérard.

"You will soon see that all this is the fault of the Haut-Brion we have just drunk. Leave go my hand, I will go and take his place," said Cardinet, going forward and placing himself between the two curtains. "Well," said he, laughing, "can you still see him ?"

"Yes."

"What !" exclaimed Cardinet, quite astounded.

"Yes, yes, he is frightful—I can see him still. He is holding out his hands covered with blood !" exclaimed Jacques, burying his face in his hands in order not to see anything further. Cardinet closed the curtains, and put his head out, saying :

"Now look, do you still see him ?"

"Yes."

"What ! you still see him, and where ?"

"He has his chin on your shoulder !"

"On my shoulder !"

"Come away or the blood will run down your cheek."

Cardinet jumped into the middle of the room, thinking he could feel the lukewarm blood on his cheek, and in spite of himself he wiped his face with his handkerchief. Feeling that he was ridiculous, he said :

"But it's very stupid. I really believed it."

All at once Bérard cried out :

"The water, the water, I can hear it flowing, Cardinet, the water is getting into my ears—he is holding me under water—save me, he has got hold of me."

On hearing the cry, the waiters rushed into the room, Cardinet, terrified, had no strength to move, whilst Bérard had fallen on the floor. There, struggling against an invisible enemy, like an epileptic patient, he was writhing and rolling about in great agony. He put his hands to his face, desirous of guarding it against some invisible attack, and said : "Mercy ! mercy ! pity ! you are crushing my head, you are killing me. Mercy, my forehead is coming away." As the waiters were holding him to prevent him hurting himself in his struggles, he suddenly made a superhuman effort and got up, drew his hand across his forehead twice and exclaimed : "I am mad !" Then, tottering, he made a fruitless effort to catch at the furniture, and throwing up his arms in the air again, fell down unconscious on the floor.

XV.

THE careful attention the poor fellow received soon brought him round again, and he was placed on the sofa. Cardinet sent the waiters away, and they retired wondering what could be the matter with the unfortunate man. Bérard, with fixed stare and confused brain, was vainly trying to understand what had happened. He remembered the fact of his wife having run away from him, because she had learnt she had been living with a galley slave; he remembered that, but why was he so tired, worn out, and weak, and in this restaurant? Cardinet, who was watching him, took his hand, and said:

"Are you better now?"

Bérard looked at him in surprise, and said:

"What! were you there?"

"Do you think I should leave you just when you have need of me?"

"No, Cardinet, I know I can rely on you, but I don't quite understand why I am here."

"And yet it's very simple," replied Cardinet, delighted to see that on becoming conscious his friend had recovered his reason; "we came in here before going to your house."

"Yes, you insisted on it."

"And you see I was quite right in doing so," said Cardinet, not daring to say too much, fearing a relapse; he waited to see whether Bérard remembered the cause of his misfortune. The latter resumed in a sombre tone:

"Yes, you were right, I should have fallen down dead had I gone home and found my house deserted. So it's done, and I am alone now."

"We must see about that."

"See about what?"

"About your house."

"My house!" exclaimed Jacques, "I will never set foot in it again."

"Are you mad!"

"Mad! but I should think you were crazy if you advised me to do such a thing."

"You don't intend to return home? What do you intend doing then?"

"Take to flight!"

"Never!" exclaimed Cardinet; whilst Bérard nodded his head in confirmation of what he had said.

"It's impossible," continued Cardinet. "In the first place you exaggerate the gravity of your position. The house belongs to you, your wife may quit it, but cannot place any one in it; your father-in-law's threats are idle, you know that well enough. You must be convinced that not a word of what your wife knows has been mentioned in the house. The clerks think it is a family quarrel, the most commonplace thing in the world. You have had a dispute with your wife, and she has come back with the children; naturally she has gone to see her parents. Taking advantage of your absence, Père Fontaine immediately came and installed himself in your house; and this is all the easier to understand from the fact that everyone in your firm heard of the scene which led to your quarrel with the Fontaine family. You can quite understand that your wife was not flattered with what she heard about you; but even supposing her affection for you should not prompt her to remain silent her affection for her children—"

"Cardinet," said Bérard, looking his friend straight in the face, "are you not deceiving me, or rather are you not deceiving yourself? Do you really think my wife has said nothing about the affair to her parents?"

"I think not."

"How do you explain Fontaine's presence at my house then? his resistance to M. Nither, and above all, his threat to place himself at the head of my business, to watch over the interests of his daughter and her children?"

Cardinet hardly knew what to say, but after a few minutes' reflection he replied:

"Your wife, on getting home, was obliged to invent some story to account for her desertion of the conjugal roof, and above all to conceal the real truth. Taking advantage of the infidelity you have shown her by your relations with other women, she has probably spoken of a separation."

"Just so, and this separation would oblige her to reveal everything."

"But your wife does not want to separate. I simply say she has probably talked of a separation, carried away by her angry feelings. You know what her parents are, they no doubt eagerly seized on this pretext, encouraged her in the idea, and knowing that you were not there, M. Fontaine immediately went to your house."

"But if they know nothing, why are they doing that? what is their object?"

"It is very clear, and I am astonished that you should ask me such a thing."

"And what is it?"

"Why, to take away all you possess."

"But how?"

"How? by a separation asked for in the interests of the children, on account of your misconduct, and your incapability of managing the business."

"Well, what then?"

"Why, you, driven from the house, M. and Madame Fontaine, together with their precious son, Adolphe, would take possession of it; the firm of Bérard & Co. would become Fontaine, Bérard, & Co., they would pay you a small pension, and the trick would be played."

"You think these people dislike me to that extent?"

"Well. They will never forgive you for that."

"You are joking!"

"No, my friend," said Cardinet, "to hate a man, to detest him, and remember the harm that has been done one, is possible with every one, but there is one thing which can only be felt by superior minds, and that is gratitude."

"Well, what is your conclusion?"

"I conclude that as the Fontaines detest you, they would have been in your house two days ago, had they but known the truth. They would have denounced you to the police, and all would have been over. I conclude that you should return to your house, take possession of your rooms, and go down to the office to-morrow morning as if nothing had happened."

"And after that?"

"After that? nothing."

"But what about my wife?"

"You need not trouble about her, inertia is the greatest force you can employ, wait a little, and you will find she will come back."

"That's just what terrifies me ! What shall I say to her when she comes back, when she shows me my children, what shall I say ?"

"You will tell her you love her ?"

Bérard walked up and down the room for a few minutes, then taking up his hat, he said to Cardinet : "I will take your advice, come with me, and don't leave me till I get home." The two friends then went away arm-in-arm ; on arriving at his house in the Rue d'Enghien, Bérard went into the doorkeeper's lodge, and astounded that functionary by saying : "Do not wake any one up ; to-morrow morning you will send for my luggage at the Orleans railway station." He then went up to his room, and there Cardinet quitted him. Left alone, he went into his wife's room, and found they had taken everything away, even to the children's clothes and linen. Bérard, feeling very melancholy, shut himself up in his room, took off his coat, snatched off his collar, which was choking him, and walked up and down the room, talking aloud to himself.

"What am I to do," said he, "if my wife and children desert me, and the law deprives me of my home, and I find myself once more a sort of a wandering Jew, without home or family, what am I to do ? Can there be a law in the country to take my children from me, or allow others to do so ? It's impossible. No, I am at home here, with my family, and intend to live and die here. For I have been punished, I have served my time, and society has now no right to demand anything more of me. They have no right to be incessantly reproaching me with my past life. They are not killing me alone, they are also attacking my poor innocent little children ; to deprive me of my wealth, they will have to employ scandal, and institute a public inquiry, and everyone must find out who I am ; my children will then be despised, and be branded as a convict's children. What must I do, my God, what must I do ?" Bérard, thoroughly exhausted, fell into an easy-chair, buried his face in his hands, and commenced weeping. When he got up he was much calmer, and throwing himself on the bed, said : "To-morrow I will put an end to this—I will save them—I have made up my mind to do so, and it is not a very heavy sacrifice I am making for them, it sometimes requires more courage to live than to die."

XVI.

He took up a newspaper lying on the table near the bed, it was the journal his brother-in-law pretended to write for. Though he never signed his name, yet it was in the police report ; Bérard therefore read on, for he knew that since the affair at the gambling saloon, young Mousson had obtained a situation in a bank. Glancing through the paper, he came across the following article.

"A young man of twenty-two, Adolphe Fontaine, surnamed young Mousson, belonging to a respectable family of unimpeachable antecedents, has embezzled a sum of fifty thousand francs from his employers, because he was unfortunate enough to meet a woman, who received him at her house, and whose bad example and advice has led him to commit the crime with which he is charged. The attitude of the prisoner is deserving of interest. He immediately confessed everything, and still appears to be suffering from the remorse due to the bad action he has committed." It was very evident that the prisoner, enabled to adopt a certain style of defence,

had chosen that of displaying penitence ; the latter part of this article, as will be seen, would have brought him out of his trouble as pure as any Pascal lamb. "The verdict was affirmative on all points, but the two prisoners were accorded the benefit of extenuating circumstances, and were condemned : Anne Davenne to five years' imprisonment, and Fontaine to two years." Bérard meditated for some time on this article, written by an old friend of young Fontaine's.

He now thought he had an arm which would enable him to fight the Fontaine family. The sentence that had just been pronounced against his wife's brother did not affect him much, knowing as he did that young Mousson was sure to be caught sooner or later. He, the man who had been condemned to the galleys, despised the man who had been sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In spite of the opinion entertained by society, he considered himself less culpable than this man who would have prison without being subject to the police supervision prescribed by article 47 of the Penal Code. He had an excuse for his conduct ; the motive by which he had been urged on was not a vile one ; he was in love, and wanted to defend the woman he loved. They had struck and insulted him, he avenged himself, but in a pitched battle, against a man stronger than himself. He had conquered, and he had in the name of human law transgressed the social law, but yet he considered himself an honest man.

Bérard now felt much calmer, and considered his position with greater coolness. If his wife's family knew about his condemnation, they had as much interest as he had in concealing the secret. The sentence just delivered against his brother-in-law obliged them to assume a very reserved attitude ; it was they who had need of him. He now felt his courage was returning, and he was quite prepared for the struggle. "After all," said he, "I have paid my debt to society, it punished me for my crime, and I have borne my punishment ; I have forced myself to live an honest life in the strictest sense of the word, to live by my work, to help those around me, and to do good to my friends. When I commenced to feel happy, I took a poor woman as my wife ; I was the cause of my misfortune, I alone have brought about my rehabilitation. When I shall say to the judges : 'You know what I was, see now what I am ! as a means of attaining this position I took for motto : Work and Honesty,' we shall see if any one dares to take up his Code to inflict further punishment on me." He then fell asleep. At daylight he was up again, and went down into his office.

Some one asking after Madame Bérard, he replied : "In consequence of a family misfortune, which has dealt a terrible blow to M. Fontaine, my wife was obliged to come back to her mother at once—she is there with the children—until the poor woman recovers herself a little."

"Ah ! yes, her brother's affair."

"Yes."

"He's been up to his 'larks' again ?"

"What do you call them ?" asked Bérard.

"I said he had been up to his 'larks' again."

"Yes, his 'larks,'" said Bérard, with a bitter smile.

The visitor went away, and the conversation was repeated in the office to the clerks. They said amongst themselves, "This explains everything, the governor did not wish to have anything to do with this business. The fact is he is very severe. When one has always been honest and does a lot of good to a family which is not one's own, it is not nice to have such things happen ; he sent his wife, though they had quarrelled with the Fontaines,

to arrange the affair, but it was too late." This seemed so natural that no one said anything more about it. Bérard concealed the anxiety he felt beneath a calm exterior, but expected every moment that the Fontaines would come and carry out the shameful plan they had conceived. Cardinet came to dinner with him every day, but Bérard was anxious at not seeing Nither, whom he had informed of his return.

END OF PART III.

PART IV.

HEARTS ARE TRUMPS.

I.

WHEN Madame Bérard left Roscoff, she was still suffering from the nervous attack she had just had. Refusing to listen to anything the servants said, she had taken her children, put them into the carriage, and got in herself, ordering the man to drive very fast, fearing her husband might overtake her. The children were at her side and the servants opposite, and she sat there, in silent meditation. At Saint-Pol-de-Léon, she asked what distance they had already travelled, and, learning she was still so near Roscoff, told them to ask the man to drive on quicker, and that she would pay double fare. On hearing this the driver immediately started off at a fearful speed, notwithstanding the hilly nature of the country. Madame Bérard's servants did not open their mouths, for, seeing her in this excited state, they did not dare speak to her—occasionally they could hear her murmuring something, then she would seize her children, cover them with kisses, and immediately relapse into silence again. The two servants were not without feeling a certain anxiety, being unable to understand this sudden departure, knowing that Madame Bérard was very fond of her husband, and that she now seemed to be flying away from him. They almost feared the poor woman's brain had been troubled by the thunder-storm. At Morlaix she made the children and servants take some refreshment, but took nothing herself. When they had all taken their places in the reserved compartment which she had ordered, and she saw that the servants were occupied with the children, she took from her pocket the newspaper the baron had sold her, and read the account of her husband's condemnation. When she had finished she asked herself whether what was taking place was not all a dream, if it could be possible that she was the wife of an escaped convict, and her children the offspring of a murderer. It appeared to her to be impossible! She wanted to speak and yet did not dare to do so. All at once she seized her children, kissed them passionately, and said in a singular tone: "Oh! no, no, you shall not suffer, my darlings." The two women looked at her, and exchanged glances. Madame Bérard saw they were asking each other whether it would not be prudent to call for a doctor at the next station. They thought she was mad! She threw herself back on her seat, covered her face with her handkerchief, and tried to weep—but the tears would not flow. Resolved to overcome this nervous attack, she said to her maid:—

"You look at me as if you were frightened, Fanny!"

"Oh! yes, madame. What can have put you into such a state? You are quite changed!"

"My poor Fanny," said Aimée with a bitter smile, "I have just had a terrible blow!"

"A blow!"

"Yes, bad news."

"News received at Roscoff."

"Yes, and which will perhaps change my entire existence."

"Oh! my God, madame, but what about Monsieur Bérard?"

"Monsieur," said she in a gloomy voice, and was about to say: "I shall never see him again!" but stopped herself.

"Monsieur Bérard has remained behind?"

Feeling that she would have to reply, and give some reason for her conduct, she said:—

"No, he went away this afternoon, we shall meet him in Paris."

"Ah! so much the better, I was afraid you had quarrelled with him."

"Oh! it would really be a pity to quarrel with him," said Aimée, sarcastically, "such an honest man!"

"Yes, madame," replied the girl, "he is a very good and kind man."

"Yes, kindness itself."

"And he worships you."

"And his children especially."

"Oh! yes."

This was too much, Aimée ground her teeth, and bit her handkerchief to pieces in her rage; then sobbing violently she at length burst into a flood of tears.

"Ah! great heavens! what is the matter with you?" asked the two servants, rushing forward greatly alarmed.

"Ah!" groaned Aimée, "I have done nothing to deserve this; and my poor little children are ruined for life." And the poor woman's tears flowed faster than ever.

"Oh! madame! what is the matter with you?" asked Fanny. "Have you met with some misfortune?"

"Oh! yes, a great misfortune, I can assure you."

Seeing their mother crying the two children rushed to her arms and commenced crying themselves. It was in vain the two servants tried to comfort Aimée, the latter was passionately kissing her children, and crying out after each embrace: "Don't cry, my darlings, don't cry—I am not crying now." And she stopped weeping.

"Mother," said the oldest of the two, "you are crying. I will tell papa!"

"Papa!" repeated the poor woman almost distracted. "Your father is dead!" then she added in a lower tone: "As far as you are concerned!"

The two affrighted servants repeated to each other: "Master is dead!" and there was nothing but a succession of complaints, groans, and tears all the way to Paris. There, Madame Bérard took a cab and drove home, telling the servants they might take a week's holiday. When she arrived in the Rue d'Enghien, she only found one woman there, the one who had been left to take care of the house. She ordered her to pack up the linen belonging to herself and the children, and to put the whole into a cab which was sent for. She told the servant to make haste, fearing every moment her husband might appear on the scene. For we must admit that besides the shame she felt at being the wife of such a man, she also felt afraid of the murderer of the Bridge of l'Estacade, of the wretch who had committed a murder under such shocking circumstances. All the

proofs of love and kindness he had showered on her during their five years of married life were totally forgotten, and nothing remained in her memory but the terrible picture of this man hanging over the bridge, and whose hands were cut up with a pair of scissors. In the opinion of this unfortunate woman, trembling for herself and her children, the man who had committed this crime was capable of anything ; she was quite overcome by that feeling of fear which one is obliged to submit to because totally unable to react against it. When the children asked her why they were moving, she told them they were going to see their grandmother and grandfather, as they had not seen them for a long time. Quite unlike most children who jump for joy when going to see their grandparents, the two infants received the news with a significant pout. The fact is Fontaine did not treat them very tenderly, he was angry with them for having a father to whom he owed everything. The parcels being put in the cab, Aimée went out with her children, got into the cab, and drove off to her parents' house. When they arrived, Père Fontaine said to her :—

" Ah ! you have come at last ! "

" What ! you expected me ! " said Aimée, greatly surprised.

M. and Madame Fontaine looked at their daughter, and, seeing her eyes red and swollen, attributed it to the effect produced on her by the news of Adolphe's misfortune. They thought that, having heard of her brother's committal, Madame Bérard had at once left her husband at Roscoff and come back to comfort them.

" We wanted to keep it from you, but you know all ! " said Désiré Fontaine.

Aimée, who thought she was stronger, who had come to tell everything, quite lost courage on seeing with what a pained look her father received the news, he who was usually so hard on Bérard ; she fell on her knees, took her two children in her arms, burst into tears, and exclaimed : " Oh ! father, what a disgrace ! " Fontaine looked at his wife, and the latter cast a furious glance at her daughter. They both drew back, astounded. What ! Aimée had travelled four hundred miles to come and add to their grief by her recriminations ; their daughter, with whom they had not been on very good terms, had come to their house, and, instead of consoling them, commenced complaining about the misfortune that had overtaken them. That's exactly what they would have done themselves, and could not forgive their daughter for being like them. Madame Fontaine said in a hard, disagreeable voice :—

" Ah ! you think he is capable of doing what he has been condemned for, you take sides with his accusers, I should never have thought my daughter was so hard-hearted. "

Aimée raised her head, threw back her hair from her lovely face bathed in tears and looked at her parents, trying to understand what they meant, for she no more understood what they were saying than if they were speaking a foreign language. Désiré Fontaine continued :

" It is no hard matter to condemn and ruin the career of an honest man, but we are doing all we can, and if those who ought to help us desert us— "

" But we ask nothing from them, " said Madame Fontaine bitterly.

" We are, thank God, strong enough to bear our own griefs, " resumed Désiré Fontaine, " poverty has no terrors for me. I have always sacrificed myself for my children, have always worked to find them food, and will not abandon them now. I am not one of those who are proud of their shameful ways, thank God, the shame is for those who believed in it. "

Though she felt rather awkward, Aimée raised her head and said :

"But you cannot think of it !"

"I am really ashamed of you," said Caroline Fontaine, "for asking such a thing."

"But the newspapers !" said Aimée, happy at this denial.

"The newspaper," said Fontaine ; then shaking his head and looking at his wife, he continued : "That's it, they read about it in the newspaper."

"The newspaper ! the newspaper ! well what about that !" exclaimed Caroline Fontaine, losing her temper, "the newspaper reports the judges' words, a lot of falsehoods. What can the newspapers say ? he is not guilty, and that's the truth of the matter."

"Not guilty ! How delighted I should be to be able to believe so, mamma !"

"Believe me ! if you are my daughter you ought to believe me ; are there any dishonest people in our family ?"

Désiré Fontaine thought this a favourable opportunity for introducing his favourite tirade. He struck an attitude, and commenced ; "Honesty ! that is my motto. I am a child of Paris, a self-made man, if my family has got on, it is through me ! and I ought to have every good citizen's support, for I have fought for them, and sacrificed everything for them. After 1830, I donned the uniform of the National Guard, and served with the battalions of order under Marechal Bugueaud. Had the Infantry been beaten, we were behind them, and should have swept the Rue Transnonain. I am a man of order, and the Courts ought not to have condemned an innocent member of my family. It was the woman who committed the crime and not he."

"Oh ! I really thought so, father."

Désiré Fontaine had got a fair start and was delighted to continue his tirade : "I am a citizen of Paris, if I defend the Government, I ought to be able to reckon on its support, I do not defend any particular man, I stand up for the cause of order. Let who will be the vicar, I always belong to the parish. But they must take care, if they attack me through my family, I shall at once enroll myself under the opposition banner. They will then see what we are made of, we men of order, should they dare to attack us through that most sacred of all things : our family." Désiré stalked up and down the room, and getting more excited as he continued, roared out, "You take everything from us, you kill us, in the same way as Napoleon died at Saint-Helena, deserted, betrayed and why ? Because they did not respect the rights of the citizens. They are serious lessons ! When a man like myself, who has proved his worth, comes to the bar and says : 'He is innocent !' they ought to believe him, or the Government, deprived of the confidence of the people, is utterly lost."

Having delivered this stupid harangue, Citizen Désiré Fontaine waited for some reply. Aimée, who had paid but slight attention to this speech, was, however, struck by the words : "When a man like myself, who has proved his worth, comes to the bar and says &c., &c." Not understanding this phrase, she said to her mother :

"What do you really think about this matter ?"

"What do I really think," said Caroline, astonished that Aimée should ask her such a simple thing, "I think the poor child was robbed by this wretched woman."

"The poor child—robbed," repeated Aimée, quite unable to understand what her mother meant.

"Besides," said Madame Fontaine, "you are rich, and knew all about it, but the day this misfortune fell upon us you hurried away, fearing we might ask you for something."

"But, mother, what are you saying; I really cannot understand you."

"After all, you never cared much for any of us."

"I don't ask our children for any gratitude, I do good for the sake of doing good," said Père Fontaine. In talking like this he really deceived himself; he forgot that from the age of fourteen, his daughter had earned her own living, and that from that day forth he had taken from her the money she earned; he forgot that if he was now living in comfortable circumstances, like a "good citizen," as he said, it was thanks to the pension paid to him by his son-in-law. Caroline continued:

"And your brother less than the others."

"But," said Aimée, seeing there was some misunderstanding, "what has my brother got to do with all this?"

"Your brother! but who else are you talking about, if not of him?"

"I was referring to my husband."

"Your husband!" said Père Fontaine.

"Well, what's the matter with your husband?" asked Caroline, sharply.

"Ah! good heavens," said Aimée, "don't you know?"

"But what's the matter?" asked her father and mother in the same breath, looking at each other, and trying in vain to guess what their daughter meant.

"Well, I've left my husband and brought my children away."

"You've deserted him?"

"For ever."

"For ever! and why?" asked her mother, anxiously.

"Oh! it's a terrible thing!"

"But tell us what it is."

"I am married to a returned convict!" said Aimée in a hoarse voice, bursting into tears.

Désiré Fontaine looked at his daughter, thinking he had misunderstood her; pronouncing each syllable slowly, he said:

"What do you say?"

"I thought you were talking about my husband's position," said the unfortunate woman, "and I was answering you."

"We were speaking of your brother."

"I found it out at last."

Aimée was not hard-hearted, she loved her brother; but she was fonder still of her husband and children, and did not therefore take much notice of what she had just heard, for the simple reason that she was thoroughly absorbed by the misfortune that had just fallen upon her. Père Fontaine on the contrary, on seeing the state of affairs, and understanding the *quid pro quo*, at once forgot all about his condemned son; his sufferings as a father decreased, whilst his hatred as a father-in-law increased; he thought the time had now come when he could get rid of that debt of gratitude towards Bérard which was weighing him down. This misbegotten, misshapen knave now appeared in his true light, fully displaying his heartless, cowardly and envious nature. Forgetful of all past benefits, he was about to attack the man who had made him what he was, and hand him over to justice, although he had already been punished by society, and was ever now suffering for his crime. The coward was quite certain his victim

could not retaliate, for he was about to attack him in the name of outraged society. Caroline was a mother, and the maternal feeling in her was so egotistical, that the shame of the one pleased her, because she thought it excused the other's crime; she felt more affection for her daughter on learning that the latter's husband was a convict. Désiré Fontaine roared out:

"A convict! a convict! you, my child, issue of our pure family, you are married to a convict! This wretch, so severe towards others, was after all, a criminal. What crime has he committed?"

"He's a murderer!" replied the young woman in a low voice.

This terrible word made the woman jump up and the man draw back. The latter continued:

"A murderer! what, my poor child, you have spent five years with this wretch, exposed day and night to be his victim. My daughter!" And Désiré Fontaine took his daughter in his arms, and kissed her on the forehead, as he had seen actors at the Ambigu do in a similar situation. Then he strode up and down the room, saying: "Ah! the wretch has come and thrown his shame on us, he pretended to help us and thought he could buy us over. Thank God! Désiré Fontaine is an honest man. It will damage his reputation, his loyal and pure past, but he will say to justice: 'Here is the guilty man, take him. Misfortune falls on my daughter and her children, but I am watching over them.'"

"But what is to be done?" said Aimée.

"What is to be done? I will tell you. From to-day, Aimée, you are a widow. This man belongs to the hangman, and we must give him up; you will give up your infamous name and resume ours."

Madame Fontaine listened to her husband who had already prepared his plan; for changing his tone and manner, that is, resuming his natural style, he took the children by the hand, led them into the next room and said: "Go and play, my darlings, but don't break anything." Then going back he handed his daughter a chair, saying: "Sit down, my child, you are now with your father, your natural protector; dry your tears, you shall come out of this beloved and respected. Caroline, come and take a seat, we must talk this matter over together seriously."

"What do you want to do?" asked Madame Fontaine.

She took a seat, Fontaine did the same, and sitting down between them, he prepared to listen to Aimée, who hardly able to restrain her tears, was sitting there with her handkerchief to her mouth, trying to stifle the sobs which were almost choking her. Fontaine, after reflecting for a few minutes, said:

"Your husband was condemned to the galleys?"

"Yes," said Aimée, still weeping.

"Courage, my child," said Fontaine, hypocritically. "Answer me frankly, to advise and save you, I must know the exact position of affairs."

"Is she sure of what she says?" asked Madame Fontaine.

"Of course," said the old man, shrugging his shoulders, as if it would be ridiculous to doubt anything his daughter might say. "As I was saying," he continued, turning to Aimée, "your husband was condemned to the galleys for murder."

"Yes."

"How long for? and when?"

"To ten years—about sixteen years ago."

"That's it," said Père Fontaine, "he has served his time, and is subject

to the article of the Code. You'll see," said the old man, running to his book-shelf and taking a volume of the Penal Code, a bound volume, which, judging from its appearance, must have been frequently referred to. He read out as follows: "Chapter III., Article 44. The effect of subjecting a man to police supervision will be to invest the Government with the right to assign certain districts in which the discharged prisoner will not be allowed to reside after leaving prison. Moreover, the prisoner must announce, on leaving prison, where he intends to take up his residence, and will receive a way-bill containing instructions as to the route he must follow—which instructions cannot be departed from—and the length of his stay in every town he may pass through. He will be required to present himself before the mayor of the commune within twenty-four hours, and cannot change his place of residence, without having announced to the mayor, three days beforehand, where he proposes to take up his residence, and must not leave the town until he has received a fresh way-bill from the mayor."

"What's that you're reading there?" asked Madame Fontaine.

"I am giving you the proof that we have got him in our power. You will see, here is the other article: 'Those condemned to penal servitude, imprisonment, or solitary confinement, are subject to police supervision, from the time of their discharge up to the day of their death.' You see that we have him in our power."

"I really do not understand you, Désiré."

"What does that matter? I understand myself." Then turning to his daughter, he added: "You now know what your husband is—you cannot wish to stay with him any longer."

"I left him at Roscoff, and was almost mad when I heard of this misfortune. I have come here with my children to stay with you. I don't wish to see him any more," sobbed the unfortunate woman.

"But my dear child, I am delighted to receive you," said Madame Fontaine.

"It's my duty," said Fontaine, sententiously, "and I have never failed to do my duty."

"But you and the children will want linen," said Madame Fontaine, who never lost her head, and thought of everything. Aimée having replied that there were two cabs down at the door loaded with luggage, she responded: "Ah! all right, we will have it brought up."

"So it's understood, my child," said Fontaine, "I am to take you in, and you are to leave your husband; you place yourself and your children under my protection. You need have no fear, I will save you.—Only you will have to declare before your mother that you will do everything I tell you, and, in fact, place yourself entirely in my hands."

"Yes, father."

"Just wait, it's better to have everything in order, sign this power of attorney," said he, making his daughter sign a paper, which he put into his pocket as soon as it was signed.

"Just arrange everything for Aimée and her children, they must be very tired. We will talk over all this to-morrow. I am now going to my lawyer about Adolphe's appeal," and he added in a lower tone: "and to register the power of attorney."

Madame Fontaine and Aimée then put the children to bed, and Fontaine went out. Though he now had a murderer for his son-in-law, and a son a swindler, the good man was not thinking of either of these, but murmured

to himself : " We will change the name of the firm from ' Bérard and Co.' to ' Fontaine and Co.' "

II.

M. FONTAINE lived at Batignolles, so he took the omnibus and got out at La Courtille ; from there he walked to the corner of the Rue Ménilmontant and the Rue Folie-Méricourt, to M. Rehtin's, who was his man of business. Seeing that the door was not locked, M. Fontaine thought to himself : " Ah ! he's there. " He knocked and some one drew aside the curtain, and looked out, but Fontaine saw nothing of this and knocked again. " It's a funny thing, and yet he must be there. Besides, he has kept me waiting like this twice before, I fancy Rehtin must be rather deaf. " He knocked louder, and could at length hear a footstep.

" Hullo ! " said M. Rehtin, who seemed twenty years older, " it's you ? Have you been knocking long ? "

" Yes, I have. "

" The fact is I am a little deaf. "

" I thought so ; one cannot always be young. "

M. Rehtin went upstairs and Fontaine followed him ; the former sat down in the armchair in the shadow of the curtains and motioned his visitor to take a seat in the chair opposite the window. We who saw M. Rehtin a few days ago, must declare it was impossible to recognise him, but the reader already knows that the man who called himself Rehtin in the Rue Ménilmontant, was known as Nither in the Rue d'Enghien ; this double character obliged him to effect this metamorphosis. The business agent known to Désiré Fontaine was a third person incarnated in the same, whom the wig, the pomades, and the spectacles had aged by twenty years in a few minutes. Désiré Fontaine had not long known this business agent of the Rue Ménilmontant. It was barely six months since the latter had sent for him to come to his office respecting an urgent affair. Désiré had gone at once, thinking it was some inheritance, and he had signed Bérard. It was by this affair, which Rehtin had arranged, that they had entered into business relations. Désiré Fontaine, like all ignorant people, had been delighted with Rehtin's sharpness, for he had twisted the Code about to suit Fontaine's wishes, and always managed to let him think he had gained the day. When they had taken their seats Rehtin said in a jovial way :

" Ah ! my dear M. Fontaine, and how are you ? "

" First class, first class ! "

" Ah ! you're a strong fellow, you are ! "

" Yes, from the age of eight, I've earned my own living, and that has accustomed me to that life of activity so necessary to health. Believe me, so long as the Government does not take in hand the question of social reform, the nation will continue to degenerate. "

" But what do you mean by social reform ? "

" Why, a thorough reform. Would you like to see a nation of strong, robust men, ready for anything, make a law obliging everyone to get up at seven in the winter and six in the summer, and go to bed at eight in the evening ; do that, and close all those places where young fellows waste their time and ruin their constitutions, and in ten years' time you will have a population composed of strong hardy men. "

" That's what you do ? "

"Yes, sir, you will see me at my window at seven o'clock every morning. Work, work, work is my motto. My only amusement is a game of dominoes in the evening at the café near my house. I take a café but no cognac, and bring back two pieces of sugar to the house—I do that because I do not like to see anything wasted; economy and sobriety—such is my motto, and it is by that I have contrived to attain my present comfortable position, at an age when others have not even commenced to make a position for themselves."

Our readers are aware how false this boast was, but Père Fontaine liked to pose like that.

"You are quite right," said Rehtin with a singular accent.

"Oh! I am not a light-headed man who loses himself in a lot of theory, I am a practical man, and if I had anything to do with the Government people would see."

"But my dear M. Fontaine, to what do I owe the pleasure of your visit? your son's affair? My brief is not prepared yet, we have still a few days."

"Yes, I know, but it isn't for that. I have full confidence in you, M. Rehtin. You have told me you will save him, and I am not anxious! you said that, didn't you?"

"I said so, and I repeat it! When the time comes he can be saved. It will simply depend on yourself."

"For my son I am prepared to do anything, because I am sure he is honest, there's no deception about us."

"I am of your opinion."

Had not M. Rehtin been in the shade, what a cruel smile Fontaine would have seen on his lips. The old man moved his chair closer to the desk, and, suddenly changing the expression of his features, said:

"Monsieur Rehtin, I have come to ask your advice about an important affair."

"An important affair?"

"Very important."

"What is it?"

"All sorts of misfortunes are falling on me at the same time. Ah! God is very cruel to me, after having afflicted me through my son, he is afflicting me through my daughter and my darling little angels, her children," said Désiré Fontaine, taking out his handkerchief and wiping his eyes—he really thought he was weeping.

"What do you mean?"

"Monsieur Rehtin, my daughter and her children have been thrown on my hands."

"Your son-in-law is dead then?"

"No."

"He has deserted them?"

"No."

"He is ruined?"

"Worse than that."

"But pray explain yourself."

"Listen, it's my daughter who has left her husband, and brought her children away; they have come to me for shelter and protection."

"Against whom?"

"Against her husband, who is ——" Désiré Fontaine looked round to make certain they were quite alone, then said in a half-whisper: "The unfortunate woman has discovered that her husband is an escaped convict."

"A convict!"

"Yes, my dear sir, yes; just see what is happening to me. Oh! my children, my poor children! Poor man, what is the use of having a fifty years' good character, a reputation for probity, and a respected name, you are held up to scorn and your children disgrace you." And Désiré again drew his check handkerchief over his eyes.

"But what do you intend doing?" asked Rehtin.

"I have come to ask your advice, for I have quite lost my head."

"You have come to ask my advice?" said M. Rehtin, leaning forward and looking at his interlocutor over his spectacles, his eyes sparkling savagely; and he repeated in a sharp metallic voice, all the while keeping his eye on Fontaine:

"You want my advice? You want to save your daughter and your grandchildren?"

"Yes, sir."

"You wish to avoid all scandal?"

"Oh! yes, that above all."

"Does your daughter love her husband?"

"Alas! yes. But who would not have been deceived? I also love the man."

"You love him?"

"Yes, sir, but I no longer esteem him. But one cannot reason about those things. I feel that I like him."

"He has always been kind to his wife and children?"

"I cannot say anything to the contrary, for that's a fact."

"Is he sharp in his business?"

"Oh! yes, he has made a fortune in five years."

"Respected?"

"His paper is as good as that of the bank."

Rehtin looked at Fontaine for a moment and thought to himself: "Can it be that this man is anxious to do the best he can for all concerned? Let us see." And he said aloud:

"You want my advice. Well, here it is; only you and your wife are aware of your daughter's present position; tell her that if her husband married her when she was poor, and has always been well-conducted whilst he was obliged to earn his daily bread, she cannot have anything to fear from him now that the future is provided for. Take her by the hand, lead her back to her husband, and say to them: 'Make haste, realise your fortune and go away from Paris, you have nothing to fear!' As for you, try to forget what you know."

M. Rehtin was watching Fontaine, and saw him shake his head, and heard him say: "Ah! but that isn't it at all, you have not understood me. I want to save my daughter's future, and that of her children."

"But what about your son-in-law?"

"I cannot interest myself in everybody. Besides, I have a great respect for the law."

"Come, do not let us beat about the bush; you want to save your daughter's future by ruining her husband."

"That's it."

"You want to deliver him up to justice?"

"The law before everything else."

M. Rehtin looked at the scoundrel for a few minutes, an indescribable smile on his features—indescribable because it was so full of hatred and

scorn—with compressed lips, shaking head, and an accent that the imbecile citizen of the Batignolles did not notice, he said :

“ Ah ! you are a man, M. Fontaine, a man of iron, you are a real citizen.”

Fontaine knitted his brows. “ Citizen,” he called him a citizen ; in his opinion that meant republican. He was always for any Government, it's true, except the Republic. The honest M. Fontaine a republican ! what a horrible thing ! Conservative if you like, conservative about other peoples' property even. He became calmer on hearing his lawyer continue :

“ Everything by the law, for the law, and to the law ! as you say. But in the name of the law, you are about to play the part of an informer against your son-in-law, others will be ready to forget and forgive him, but you, Code in hand, will put your hand on his shoulder and deliver him up to justice. Your daughter will end her days in poverty, crushed by the terrible name of “ the wife of a convict.” But what matters, you must sacrifice all your fatherly feeling to your respect for the law. The little children, the little angels, as you call them, the little ones who were born rich, who have led a luxurious, calm and merry life, without trouble of any kind, then will be called the convict's children ; what matters ? Above all this, you who are a strong man, place your duty as a citizen. You forget all that in your devotion to the law. You are a man of character.”

Honest M. Fontaine had insensibly risen from his chair ; with his hand in his waistcoat, and his head down, his countenance disfigured by a self-sufficient smile, he was listening to the praise addressed to his force of character. He could not help exclaiming :

“ Ah ! you understand me, you do. That's how we were in my time ! ”

With a scornful expression Rehtin continued :

“ Ah ! you have very just views ! you said so just now : you do not lose your head in a lot of theories, you are a practical man. In a man's bosom, there are two things, the heart and the liver, the heart makes one suffer, and the liver enables one to live—in the natural order of things, and those who transpose the two are ill—everything for the stomach eh ? ”

Fontaine sat gazing in an idiotic way at Rehtin as if he could hardly understand what he meant. But M. Rehtin saw that however stupid his client might be, he would ultimately understand him, so he stopped. Désiré Fontaine said : “ I don't quite understand you.”

“ I was summing up by saying that you placed duty above everything else, that to serve the law you were ready to sacrifice everything, daughter, relations, friends—and I was remarking the rare perfection to which you had attained, that you did not content yourself with delivering the guilty man up to justice, but that without in any way benefiting society, you were about to deliver up a man, who had served his time, for the simple satisfaction of doing your duty as a citizen, you are going to break your heart to satisfy your conscience.”

“ You are quite right, M. Rehtin, it *will* break my heart, but I must calmly continue, and thus be able to say : ‘ I have satisfied my conscience.’ ”

There was a few minutes' silence, during which Rehtin searched amongst his papers to give himself time to recover his sang-froid ; then feeling calmer, he resumed : “ But what do you wish to do, my dear M. Fontaine ? ”

“ You must first give me some information.”

“ What do you want to know ? ”

“ I am a father, and must protect the interests of my daughter and her children.”

“ Just so.”

"What am I to do?"

"Wishing to avoid all scandal and to save your name at the same time as the interests of your daughter and her children, you must arrange for a separation, by coming to a friendly understanding with your son-in-law."

"The separation will place us at the head of the business, and we can allow him a pension," said Fontaine joyously.

"Oh! no, on the contrary."

"How's that?" asked the astonished Fontaine.

"Should a separation take place, your daughter will obtain an allowance to bring up the children, but her husband will retain control of the funds, in order to be able to pay her the pension."

"Not at all!"

"But what do you want to do?"

The little man got up, walked about the office for a moment, then coming up to Rehtin, said:

"M. Rehtin, I am a straightforward man, and am for the law—and for justice. I am an honest man, and ready to trample on my dearest feelings if necessary, but I will not trifle with my duty."

"Well?"

"I will not compound with guilty men, I have no right to do so, they belong to justice. It's a catastrophe which drags them down—I know them no longer, and my only desire is to save my daughter and her children from the wreck."

"You speak as if your son-in-law were already in the hands of the police?"

"He will be to-morrow."

"What makes you think that?" said Rehtin, gazing intently at the honest Fontaine.

"I don't think so, I know it."

"You know what?"

"I know that as soon as my daughter's affairs are in order, I shall give him up."

"You!" said Rehtin, jumping up so quickly that Fontaine recoiled, thinking the old man was going to spring on to him. The latter smiled to see him so frightened, and, hardly able to restrain his anger, said:

"I think some one knocked downstairs."

"No, I heard nothing. When I saw you jump up, you frightened me."

"I beg your pardon," said Rehtin, sitting down again.

"Rehtin," said Fontaine, "you are an intelligent man, and will understand me."

"Well, tell me frankly what you want to do, and I will let you know whether it is possible or not."

"That's just what I want."

"I am all attention."

"In the first place, my son-in-law Bérard was condemned sixteen years ago to ten years' penal servitude."

"Sixteen years ago," said Rehtin, getting up, "what do you say his name is?"

"Jacques Bérard."

Rehtin went towards his book-case, and, without the slightest hesitation took a volume of the "*Gazette des Tribunaux*," opened it and said: "Here is the case, Jacques Bérard, murder on the Bridge of l'Estacade, two prisoners."

"Ah! how strange," said Fontaine, then suddenly changing his tone he added: "So it's in print?"

"Yes," said Rehtin who had just read out aloud: "Ten years' penal servitude."

"Well, here is my plan," resumed Père Fontaine, "I wish in the name of my daughter and her children—"

"But you will require a power of attorney."

"I have that," said the thoughtful father, showing the paper signed by his daughter.

"Ah! very good," said the business agent in a singular tone.

"In their name to take possession of the business which will be left without control when he is arrested. We shall quit Batignolles, my wife and myself, and Aimée will go with her children to live on the Ile de la Grande-Jatte. I know it's very hard to have to begin work again at my age, but for my children's sake I will do it. You have assured me of Adolphe's acquittal, he has already been in the business and can take the management of it, after us."

"All that is easy."

"Ah! how pleased I am—for my poor daughter's sake."

"That's quite understood. Listen to me, M. Fontaine."

"I am all attention."

"If you wish this plan—which is that of a brave and honest father—to succeed, you must leave nothing to chance."

"Very good."

"The most absolute discretion."

"You can count on me—I shall not go and boast of having a son-in-law—"

"Very good, not a word—this evening I expect to receive certain papers which will enable us to prove your son's innocence. I am now going to set to work to enable you to put your plan into execution, for you must know that he was condemned and married in his real name, and a separation is therefore impossible, for that reason at least."

"But what are you saying?"

"The truth,—but don't be uneasy, I will find something else. Only I warn you that the slightest indiscretion would spoil everything—In the first place, it is very evident that if this secret were revealed before your son's case came on, it would compromise everything."

"You are right, let us first save Adolphe."

"Just so, we can ruin the other man afterwards."

"It's understood. I won't say a word, don't let me disturb you, I can find my way out. When shall I see you again?"

"I will write to you."

"Very good; adieu."

"Adieu."

"My poor Jacques!" murmured the business agent, when Fontaine had gone away.

III.

M. REHTIN remained there quite an hour, with his face buried in his hands, pressing his forehead as if to extract from his tortured brain some luminous idea. Suddenly he heard a discreet knock at the door, he got up, feeling very anxious, and said:—"That wretch must have left the door

open downstairs." He went to the door, opened it, and a young girl, dressed like a shopwoman, came in.

"Ah ! it's you, my child," said Rehtin, rushing back to his shady corner, "come in and sit down."

"Well," said he, when the girl had found a seat, "what have you done?"

"What you told me to do, sir."

"Very good, tell me all about it."

"In accordance with your instructions, I went, three days ago, to the Café des Bouffes, in the Rue Monsigny, the café where there are pictures. I then asked the waiter in a loud voice :

"'Do you belong to Dijon?'

"'Proud to say I do,' he replied.

"'Do you know Ormond?'

"'No,' said he.

"At that moment an individual who was sitting close to me, said in a low voice :—

"'You are Petite.'

"'Yes, sir,' said I.

"'I will wait for you in a cab, opposite the theatre,' said he, paying for his drink and going out. I did the same thing a few minutes afterwards and rejoined him. The same evening he took me to the prison."

"Very good."

"The next morning, I found myself in company with Anna Davesne, in the exercise ground."

"Did you know her?"

"I dined with her and Adolphe once, at Lorémont's house. We kissed, and she asked me why I was there, I told her it was through Lorémont, that they supposed I was his accomplice ; which did not appear to astonish her. We got friendly, and I ultimately told her I was not at all anxious about my future, being certain of getting out shortly, having powerful protectors. She remarked she wished she could say the same for herself. I told her that if she would take my advice, I might be able to help her ; from that moment she never lost sight of me, but the more confidential she got, the more reserved I became. That was enough for one day, the next day I went up to her accompanied by another woman, the one you mentioned to me. I put her at her ease, and she at once began to tell everything she knew, and to boast that she could do whatever she liked with young Adolphe, that if she could contrive to get out of her present scrape, she had quite enough to start again with, thereupon I left her, and, together with my companion, immediately went to the Record Office and gave our evidence."

"Very good, very good," said Rehtin.

"The next day, I had received your letter, I told her I was going out, and promised to do what I could for her. She asked me whether I would take a letter for her mother, and I consented to do so. It happened just as I expected, the letter she gave me advised her mother to go away to Brussels, where she would soon rejoin her."

"Have you got that letter?"

"Yes."

"Give it to me."

"Ah ! you know, M. Rehtin, I have succeeded in doing what you asked ; one good turn deserves another : you promised to restore Lorémont to me."

"I have and will keep my word ; but I said it would be at the end of

the month ; and that it should be you who should go and deliver him, if you still thought him deserving that favour."

"I don't understand what you mean."

"That doesn't matter to day. You will take my word?"

"Oh ! yes !"

"Well, give me that letter."

"There it is," said Petite, giving him the letter. He read as follows:—

"Dear mother, Do not be uneasy about me ; I can speak freely to you because this letter will not pass through the hands of the prison people, as it is a friend who is going to bring it to you. I am almost certain Adolphe and I will be acquitted. The affair will be arranged all right. Now mother, I beg and pray of you to go abroad as soon as you get this letter, to Brussels if possible. Take all the papers out of my wardrobe. In the dressing-room, on a shelf, you will find an old box of ribbons and flowers ; take it, tie it up, and carry it away. Be very careful about it. I have certain valuable souvenirs in it which I wish to keep, and above all, to conceal from everyone. Write to me as soon as you get to my friend's house, she will give you my address. Your loving daughter, ANNA DAVESNE.

"P.S. Don't forget the box, and be careful not to disturb anything in it."

"Ah ! ah !" said M. Rehtin, "everything depends on this box."

"You see that I have succeeded."

M. Rehtin searched in his drawer, took out a five hundred franc note and gave it to Petite, saying :

"And there's a proof of my satisfaction."

"This is nothing. It's your other promise I am thinking about the most," said Petite, who put the note into her pocket, nevertheless.

"My girl, I said at the end of the month."

"I shall count on it ; what am I to do now?"

"Do you see Grosbouleau every day?"

"Nearly every day."

"You must obtain from him a detailed account of all the 'jobs' done during the last two years."

"What is this you are asking me ? But it would be providing you with a rope to hang Lorémont."

"What, you again refer to that. Do I not tell you he shall be delivered up to you ? You will do what you like with him. I continue—the details of the services rendered in all this business by young Mousson."

"I understand you."

"You will set about it at once?"

"Yes, this very evening. Good-bye, M. Rehtin."

Petite made a curtsy and went away. Rehtin opened his drawer and took out a voluminous bundle of papers to which he pinned the letter he had just received from Lorémont's mistress, or rather his slave. "Now," said he, "I have got them all in my power, and can manage the affair in my own way. Yes, I have got them, and I was stupid enough to suppose for a moment, that men were to be led by kindness and honesty. What a child, what a simpleton I was. Men are only to be managed through their vices. I thought I was performing an act of humanity in dressing the wound to cure it. On the contrary, all that is done to keep it open. Society lives on its misfortunes." M. Rehtin looked at his watch.

"The deuce !" said he, "it is time to become M. Nither again." He went and shut the door, in order to operate the transformation, when it was pushed open and a head appeared.

"Ah ! Grosboubleau," said he, "you are late to-day."

"I beg your honour's pardon, there are two of us, and as you know, when one is in agreeable witty society, the time passes very quickly."

"Two of you ! Who have you with you ?"

"Lalongueur."

"It's true. Have you any fresh news ?"

"I rather think we have—a pocketful. Shall I tell him to come up."

"Yes, let him come up."

Whilst M. Rehtin went back to his seat near the desk, Grosboubleau went halfway downstairs, and called Lalongueur, and the latter's immense anatomy was soon blocking up the stairway. Grosboubleau's partner came into the office and went up to the desk, close to his friend ; standing in an erect position, with their caps in their hands, they waited for a word from the master. The latter, having looked at them for several minutes, said :

"Grosboubleau, you undertook to follow Cardinet ?"

"Well, sir, this morning, about ten o'clock, he came out of his house, and went to the Rue d'Enghien, as he did yesterday ; and stopped there all day. At nine o'clock he came out and went to the Rue des Martyrs, to Linotte's house, where I met Lalongueur."

"You were there, Lalongueur ?"

"Yes," replied that worthy, "since seven o'clock in the morning ; you can't imagine how heavily the time hangs on one's hands, especially for a man like myself, accustomed to going a good deal into society."

"What did you see ?" asked Rehtin.

"Ah ! that's it. Until Cardinet's arrival, she did not stir ; but as soon as he came, she went out with him, and in spite of the lateness of the hour, they went for a walk."

"Did you follow them ?"

"As a cab follows the horse that draws it. In the first place I was with Ugène, and the time didn't appear so long."

"Well ?"

"Well," continued Lalongueur, "they went to the Elysée-Montmartre."

"To the Elysée-Montmartre ?"

"Yes, sir. Don't you know the Elysée ?"

As Lalongueur appeared astonished at M. Rehtin's ignorance, Grosboubleau shrugged his shoulders, and said :

"M. Rehtin is too old for that !"

"Ah ! it's true. One can't be young for ever. I was saying that we went to the Elysée-Montmartre. A very fashionable ball-room, no one can say anything to the contrary ; that's why I don't mind going myself. There at least I am sure of not meeting people whom I could not recognize elsewhere."

"But what did you do ?" asked Rehtin, becoming impatient.

"Ah ! that's another thing. Ugène will tell you that ; he did all."

"This is it, sir ; I said to Lalongueur, we mustn't joke, we were sent here for a purpose. 'To dance,' said he. I shrugged my shoulders."

"Come," said Lalongueur, "it's quite true what he says. If they go to the ball, it's to dance. But not at all. The fact is, Ugène has a rare eye."

"No, I've a good nose."

"An eye and a nose."

"Yes, I know that," replied Grosboubleau ; then turning to Rehtin, he continued : "You know that's a gift of nature, one cannot acquire it."

Well, I possess that gift, and when I say it's so and so, so and so it is, and no mistake."

"It's quite true what he says," chimed in Lalongueur; "when he says it's so and so, it is so, and no mistake."

Rehtin who had smiled at first, now became impatient, and said rather sharply: "All this is nonsense, you said you had something interesting to tell me, what is it?"

"Well," said Grosboulean, "I said to Adolphe, we must look out, they might go away unbeknown to us, and I put him on guard at the door of the ball-room, behind the Municipal Guard in front of the cloak-room."

"I stopped there three hours, and every time they changed the Municipal Guard he said to me: 'You must be enjoying yourself.' 'Famously, and you?' said I. At the fourth man they changed, he asked the cloak-room woman whether I was a gas lamp."

"That's a personal matter, and has nothing to do with M. Rehtin—I continue—I put Lalongueur at the door, and commenced following them about the ball-room, and did not lose sight of them for a moment. All at once, I was about ten steps away from them, leaning forward as if listening to the cornet, when Cardinet turned round, came straight up to me and lifted his hand. I put mine over my face, thinking he was going to strike me, but not at all, he simply said:

"'Ah! how are you, M. Grosboulean, isn't your friend Lalongueur with you. How are you?' And so he went on; half-an-hour after that we were all three sitting round a bowl of hot spiced wine."

"Ah! there's a drink, if you like, M. Rehtin; whenever you go to a ball, I advise you to ask for that, it's a most refreshing drink."

"Well?" said Rehtin, getting more impatient than ever.

"He told me the baron was arrested, and that if we liked to enter his service for another affair, he would pay us handsomely. You know, sir, that we are not dishonest people."

"We are not scoundrels."

"And so you refused?" said Rehtin.

"I refused, and yet I didn't."

"You did quite right."

"I said to Cardinet, 'Well, I'll think it over, I'll let you know, I'll see,' and so on and so forth."

"And you are to see him again?" asked Rehtin.

"Yes, sir, this evening."

"And what do you want of me?"

"Sir," said Grosboulean, nudging Lalongueur to make a bow, "you are our master, it is through you we were liberated, and we have come to you for orders."

Rehtin gazed intently at the two knaves, who, bowing low, were waiting for him to speak. "Well," said he, "you can do as he wants you, and tell me everything you do for him."

"Very good, sir."

"To-morrow you can come and give me an account of your interview."

"To-morrow we will be here at the same time."

"Good day."

Notwithstanding this intimation that they were free to retire, the partners still stood there in a very sheepish attitude. As Rehtin was anxious to get away he said: "What are you waiting for?"

Grosboulean looked at Lalongueur as if to give himself courage, and said:

"M. Rehtin, I am ashamed to mention it, but life has certain cruel exigencies."

"What do you mean?"

"My dear M. Rehtin, we are on the verge of starvation, and as my stomach requires twice as much nourishment as any ordinary—"

"Ah! you want some money," said Rehtin, laughing. "Here you are," he added, slipping a napoleon into each of their hands.

"You are as good as a Dutch father to us," said Lalongueur.

The two knaves then went out. On getting into the yard, Lalongueur said to his chum: "This evening we shall draw some money from the other bloke."

"Certainly, as he forces us to do it. We are not dishonest."

"That's just it—it's to spend a little of that money."

"Oh! my friend, as we are going to receive some more to-night—But what do you want to do with it?"

"I want to buy a surprise for Petite, poor little angel."

Lalongueur made a grimace, but said nothing.

IV.

THE different scenes we have just related took place before Bérard's return to Paris; and our readers can now understand the tangled skein of our story forming the net in which the condemned man was to be caught. But let us return to Bérard. He was at first astonished by his wife's desertion, but Cardinet reassured him on that point; having obtained information, he had learnt that Madame Bérard, who had at first spent all her time with her parents, remained in her room with the children, that she cried whenever she looked at the portrait of himself that she wore in her brooch—a New Year's gift from him. He also learnt, by an old servant, that one day she got up early, dressed, and was about to go out, when her mother stopped her, saying: "Where are you going?"

"To the house."

"What house?"

"Why, to my house; I want to see Jacques, I must speak to him."

Madame Fontaine closed the door, took the key and put it in her pocket, then, walking up to her daughter, said: "But Aimée, who do you take us for? What part do you want your father to play? What! he devotes himself to your interests, he is doing all he can to save you from a painful position. At the risk of incurring the hatred of your husband, he receives you into his house, takes your part, and now you want to betray him. Aimée, you ought to have said you were playing a comedy—that you wanted to be this—gentleman's wife, and not the daughter of an honest man." As Madame Fontaine's tirade only served to sadden her daughter, without convincing her, she added, so as to appeal to her feelings as a mother: "Besides, it is not for you I am doing it; you are free, but leave me your children; don't let this disgrace fall on them."

"Oh! it's frightful," said Aimée, going back to her room. From that day forth, she did not go out, but remained in her room with the children. Bérard therefore knows that his wife is on his side, in spite of herself. He has therefore but one object, and that is to rescue her from the clutches of her egotistical parents.

* * * * *

But as we said, let us return to Bérard. It was a lovely day, and the sun was shining gaily in his room. He had opened his window to enjoy the beauty of the day, when he suddenly saw his friend Cardinet turn out of the Rue Hauteville into the Rue d'Enghien. The poet was walking along proudly, with joyous look and merry face, taking long breaths of this happy air, forgetting both past and future, smiling at everything and everyone.

"Cardinet is radiant to-day," said he to himself, "and looks as if he were the bearer of joyful news."

He closed the window, rang for his servant, and told him to "go and let Cardinet in and serve up the breakfast." He then went into the breakfast room, and whilst waiting for his friend, filled up the glasses with a sparkling wine. Cardinet came in; Bérard looked at him, and on seeing his friend's face, knitted his brows, put the decanter down on the table, and said: "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Cardinet, looking somewhat embarrassed, "why do you get up? Sit down— Some slight annoyance— I'll tell you about that whilst we are at breakfast."

Bérard sat down, whilst Cardinet took his seat opposite him; the former resumed: "Oh! what a singular thing, it is a lovely day, the sun is shining brightly; when I saw you coming—"

"You saw me coming?" asked Cardinet, quickly.

"Yes; I saw you turn the corner of the Rue Hauteville, and you appeared to have happiness in your pockets, in your face, and in fact all over your person—"

"What!" said Cardinet, making an effort to reply, "you, who have lived such a hard life, you who have seen the sunny side of existence, you still have presentiments?"

"Not presentiments, sensations. There are things that one cannot explain."

"The sun makes you merry."

"Yes."

"You live through your eyes."

"Certainly not, stupid—I live by my senses. Certain smells remind me of the little church at Nogent when I was confirmed— Ah! how nice that smelt—the odour of incense reminds me of my marriage."

"All gaieties have their special perfume."

"But not only that, there are terrible odours, for instance the taste of dust that follows a heavy rain—"

"What is that?"

"I can see the quay, the trees, the pouring rain, and the great wooden bridge, the Bridge of l'Estacade."

"What's the use of thinking about all that?" said Cardinet, getting up and taking his friend's hand.

"And then," continued Bérard, "there is an odour that nearly chokes me, and makes me cough—the odour of tar. I can see the convict prison, the sea, the great woodwork we had to tar—" Here the unfortunate man stopped, plunged in gloomy thoughts, whilst the sun continued shining through the windows, scintillating on the wine glasses and decanters.

"Jacques," said Cardinet, taking his friend's hand, "I have some important things to tell you, for which you will need all your courage. My dear Jacques," continued Cardinet, "you must take action, this very day you must attack what is standing in your way; your wife, yourself and your children are all threatened: it is a question of life or death!"

"Life or shame you mean," said Bérard, bravely.

"No. Life, I say—your children, your wife."

"My children," said the unfortunate man, making an effort to repress his sobs; "I am ready!"

"Listen," said Cardinet, "and above all, be calm."

There was a few minutes silence, during which they both tried to persuade each other they were eating. Cardinet drank off a glass of wine, wiped his mouth, and commenced: "Jacques, you are surrounded by enemies; it was only yesterday I discovered the plot laid against you."

"Enemies!"

"Yes; enemies, whom you have always looked upon as your most devoted friends—"

"Pray explain yourself."

"I will, by taking them one by one; you have, in the first place, all the Fontaines against you."

"I know that."

"Père Fontaine has almost forgotten about his son, since he thought it possible to realise his dream, which is to dispossess you, ostensibly on behalf of your wife and children, but really for his own personal benefit. A family council is to take place this evening at his house, and this council is to decide as to your fate; that is to say, your fate will not be discussed, for you are already condemned, but the council will declare that for the sake of the children who are under age, your wife will be installed with the little ones, in the house on the Ile de la Grande Jatte, and that M. Fontaine is to manage the business."

"But it would be folly."

"That's just why it will be done."

"But I shall oppose it."

"You, my dear Jacques; to-morrow morning the police will be here to arrest you, you are to be denounced as an escaped convict."

Bérard had no strength to reply; his arms fell motionless by his side; and he bowed his head beneath the shock. Cardinet continued:

"I told you you would require all your courage, Jacques."

"Continue—I will be courageous," gasped Jacques.

"You might perhaps escape from this danger, but you are threatened in another direction."

"By others?"

"Yes, I have bought over two brigands, who have told me everything. The baron, who wanted to blackmail you—"

"Ah! why did I refuse!" groaned the unfortunate man.

"You did quite right—you would not have prevented, you would only have postponed what is now occurring. The baron is in custody, as you are aware, and intends to reveal everything to the police."

"Then I am done for!"

"That is not all, do you know who is directing the whole business? Who has arrested the late mistress of this baron, this Lorémont, the servant girl who used to be in your house, through whom he discovers where her lover was hiding—the man who, unknown to me, has put me on the track of this knave and made me arrest him. He who is advising the Fontaine family in this affair, who is to ruin you and save young Adolphe?"

"How can I tell?" said Bérard, feeling anxious, "it's a lover of Linotte's or Linotte herself, perhaps."

"How human you are in what you say. The only woman who wanted

to save you, and who has revealed every thing to me—and that is the woman you are afraid of.”

“But who is it then?”

“Who? why a strange man whom I always supposed to be your friend, a man named Rehtin, who lives in the Rue Ménilmontant, where he has a sort of business agency which is, in reality, a police office.”

“Rehtin?” said Bérard, wondering who it could be.

“Yes, Rehtin, reverse the word, and you have the real name, Nither, your pretended protector.”

“M. Nither!—But it’s madness!” exclaimed Jacques Bérard.

“It’s the truth.”

“M. Nither! the man who made me what I am—ruin me—and what for?”

“Why, it’s very simple. He has sold you his business, and has received a great part of the money. He wants to keep what he has received and to get back the business again into the bargain.”

“And you are certain of this?”

“Absolutely certain. I have obtained the services of the two knaves who are acting as his spies, by paying them twice as much as he pays them.”

Bérard remained for a few seconds quite thunderstruck, refusing to believe what he had just heard. “But,” said he, “do you know who this man is? do you know how he made my acquaintance?”

“I tell you what I know.”

“Listen, Cardinet. I am lost—it is no longer a question of recovering my position, but I want to succumb properly, and to cry out to society who is pursuing me: Repentant for the crime committed, I have become an honest citizen, and now you kill me—to save those scoundrels whom you despise, but who have been clever enough to keep just within the limits of the law—Cardinet, I am lost, but I refuse to believe that it is through Nither.”

“And why?”

“I will tell you,” said Bérard, drawing closer to his friend and taking his hand. “The day I made the last payment to Nither, when he was about to retire into the country, he came to dine with us at Neuilly—it was the day our house was broken into—M. Nither told me a sad story, the death of my mother whom he had known,—and loved,” added Jacques, with an effort, “and who killed herself for his sake.”

“What are you saying?” exclaimed Cardinet, astounded.

“The truth! let me finish. When I asked him why he had waited till then to tell me this story, he replied as follows; I well remember the words for they are indelibly graven on my memory:

“That was my sole reason for coming to Neuilly. This month the business will belong entirely to you, and it was necessary you should know why you had been enabled to attain such a position so easily and so rapidly, I am going to leave Paris, and must and will tell you everything. The death of Adèle, your mother, produced terrible consequences for you, but I did not know it till long afterwards, for, when she died, you were barely two years old. The revelation caused by my shameful conduct led your father to feel doubts as to his paternity, and he abandoned you, disappearing completely without leaving the slightest trace of his whereabouts. Brought up as a poor man’s child, you commenced to earn your living in the workshop when you were ten years old, and you lived, not with the better class of workmen having families and homes, but with the waifs and strays; you thus got into very bad company. Your entire life was ruined by this. One day, I hardly know how, I heard Adèle had left a son, whom the father

had abandoned, and I cannot tell you what a painful effect this news produced on me. I blamed myself for everything that had happened. It was I who had made Adèle all she had been, and who had caused her death. It was therefore I who had deprived this child of his father and mother, and exposed him to the temptations to which he had succumbed. I had, in fact, been the prime cause of his ruin. Once I had got this idea in my mind, I could not rest; my business was increasing daily, every one envied me, and yet I was perpetually haunted by this souvenir and this feeling of remorse. From that day forth, I had no peace, and did everything possible to obtain your pardon. Your conduct greatly facilitated this; I got a friend to send you to me, when you came out of prison, and took you into my house. You know the rest.'

"That's what Nither told me; so you see, Cardinet, this man is almost my father. Do you still believe what has been said about him?"

Cardinet remained for some seconds plunged in deep thought, then, raising his head and looking Jacques straight in the face, he said:

"Jacques, nothing has been said, I saw it. At first I doubted, as you do, I wanted to make certain there was no mistake, and I saw everything with my own eyes."

"And you think?"

"I think this man is a scoundrel."

"Never! even should my belief in him ruin me, I will never doubt him."

"And you are quite right, my dear Jacques," said Nither, who at that moment came in. Cardinet jumped up from his chair, turning first pale, then crimson; and murmured in a confused way:

"Where did he spring from? This must be a juggler's dining-room!"

M. Nither came up with a smile, held out his hand, and said:

"And you, my dear Cardinet, if Jacques is right in thinking as he does, you are not wrong in believing what you have seen—or rather what you think you have seen."

V.

THE day Bérard dined with Cardinet, Père Fontaine had dressed himself and said to his wife:

"Caroline, get the dining-room ready for this evening's meeting."

"And where are you going?" said she.

"To the auction rooms in the Rue Drouot."

"What! a day like this, when we are going to hold a family council!"

"But it's a very important matter. There is something in a sale to-day which will enable me to ruin Bérard."

"What is it?"

"You will see," said Désiré, with a knowing smile, taking up his hat and walking out of the room. The sale Père Fontaine had gone to attend was a curious collection of old furniture, pictures, &c., &c. It was Rehtin who had advised him to go, and purchase a "View of a Convict prison," a study from life, which was to be sold. This picture represented the port of Toulon, a splendid sea and a lovely sky; that was something, but Fontaine, who had come to the public view, had seen nothing of all that; he had seen nothing but a single face, that of one of the four convicts, the face of his son-in-law Bérard. The picture went at seventy francs, which Père Fontaine grumbling paid, consoling himself with the reflection that the frame was worth the money almost, and that the picture

would be the means of inducing his friends to do as he wished. Carefully carrying his purchase under his arm he returned to Batignolles and got home just as the first guests were arriving for the family council.

"What's that you've got there?" said Madame Fontaine.

"Look," said Désiré triumphantly, showing the picture.

"I think there was no need to spend money on that—what are we to do with it? I would rather have had your photograph!"

"But, Caroline, can't you see anything?"

"What?"

"Look at that," said he, "the face of the second convict."

"Ah!"

"You recognise it?"

"It looks like Bérard."

"So it is. Let him deny it now—here's the catalogue: No. 171, View of the Convict prison, Toulon."

"Ah! we have him this time!" said Madame Fontaine.

The charming couple then went into the dining-room, and the picture was placed on the table, with the number of the "*Gazette des Tribunaux*" containing the account of the trial and conviction of Jacques Bérard.

VI.

THE morning of this same day, Petite was sleeping in her little room in the Rue Pelée, dreaming that all the troubles were over. Lorémont was soon coming out of prison; obliged to maintain a certain reserve which would necessitate a total change of life, he would have to leave Paris and she would then be able to go and live with him in some small provincial town. She would then love him and lead him to love her. Luxuriously indulging in these dreams, she was suddenly woke up by a loud knock at the door. Jumping up she looked around her, seeing she was in her own room, she knitted her brows and said: "Who's there?"

"It's me," said Grosboubleau. "Open the door quick!"

Petite hastily dressed herself, and went to let the gentleman in.

"Quick! quick, put on your things and clear out!"

Petite shrugged her shoulders, knowing she was protected, and replied in an indifferent tone: "What's the matter?"

"The matter is, my darling, that that scoundrel of a Lorémont has 'peached' on all of us, and denounced us to—"

"Well, what then?" said Petite calmly.

"What do you mean, what then? we are all done for, and there are warrants out against all of us. I ought to be far away, but wanted to warn you, and save you. Lalongueur is watching downstairs, to see whether we are being followed."

"Thank you, save yourselves, I stay here—I have nothing to fear."

"But he has denounced you as well, and I happened to know you are the one he has accused the most."

"That doesn't matter."

"But M. Rehtin told me to warn you."

"What! you know Rehtin!" exclaimed Petite.

"Rather! he has already saved us once."

Petite made no reply, but sitting on the edge of the bed, she thought to herself: "Then I have been deceived—this man was making use of me to

build up the charge against us. I have been played with once more." Then she asked : " But what did M. Rehtin say to you ? "

" He called me this morning and said : ' You are two knaves for whom hanging is too good.' I replied : ' M. Rehtin, you are very hard on us.' ' No,' said he, ' you deserve worse than that, but you have served me honestly and I am grateful to you. Lorémont has informed against you ; you are accused of eleven burglaries, and various other things ; I should have a long time in prison if they caught me. ' To-morrow,' continued Rehtin, ' you will be arrested and Lalongueur with you ; there are a hundred francs each, get away as quick as you can.' You would have thought I had a pair of wings, so quickly did I fly away on hearing this. He stopped me, and I said to him, ' But I am not to be arrested till to-morrow.' ' That is not all,' said he—' you know Petite ? ' ' I rather think I do,' says I, ' she's my guardian angel '—' Well, tell her to get away as soon as possible, she is in a worse plight than you are, he has declared that it was she who introduced herself into the houses to prepare for the burglaries, that she was implicated in the eleven burglaries. Not only that, he mentioned a story about a child ; she will know what that means.' "

Petite turned pale, and her eyes sparkled in such a singular way that Grosboubleau stopped short.

" What ! " she said, grinding her teeth, " he spoke about the child ? "

" Yes," said Grosboubleau.

With sparkling eyes, foaming mouth, and clenched fists, Petite walked up and down the room. At this moment there was a knock at the door, and Petite placed her finger on her lips as a sign for Grosboubleau to be quiet. A voice was heard saying :

" Mademoiselle Boitard, it's a letter for you."

" I am in bed, slip it under the door," said Petite.

" It's something urgent, it didn't come through the post," said the voice outside.

" All right, thanks."

Petite picked up the letter and read as follows : " My child, I promised to save you if you served me, and will keep my promise. Yesterday during his final examination, the man you love, Lorémont, accused you of being the principal accomplice in the robberies he is charged with, moreover he has denounced you as the author of a shocking crime. A warrant will be issued against you before mid-day, if you have not yet been informed, look out for a hiding-place at once. The first part of my promise is now fulfilled, I shall fulfil the other whenever you ask me to do so." This letter was not signed.

" But," said Grosboubleau, seeing Petite in such a pensive mood, " we must make haste."

Claire Boitard, surnamed Petite, raised her head, looked at this scoundrel who was so fond of her, and said : " You love me, don't you ? "

" Oh ! yes, Petite."

" You are devoted to me ? "

" Unto death."

" And Lalongueur ? "

" Lalongueur thinks as I do."

" If I say to you : ' Come with me,' whatever may be my idea, my object, you will not recoil, you will accomplish it ? "

" I will follow you."

" And if your life is at stake ? "

"Our lives are in your hands."

"But you do not know me, *Ugène*, notwithstanding my mild appearance. I am a determined woman; and crush whoever refuses to obey me. I want two devoted men who will sacrifice themselves entirely for me, who will go as far as committing a crime."

"What!"

"Are you both prepared to go so far?"

"Prepared to commit a crime?"

"Yes, a crime—I must be revenged on *Lorémont*."

"On the baron—ah! we are ready then, the coward, the traitor, is that the crime? Ah! in that case we are quite ready!"

"Very good, I will take you both with me, give me time to dress, and just pack that trunk."

"But I say, we cannot go far, you know how much money we have got."

"You need not be uneasy on that score, I have plenty."

Petite hastily put her things on, whilst *Grosbouleau* packed the trunk; and as she was now ready he put it on his shoulder and said:

"Where are we going?"

"To the Eastern Railway station, you can go on in front with the trunk, I shall be ten paces behind you on the other side of the street, *Lalongueur* can follow us."

"Very good. Let's be off."

They went downstairs, rejoined *Lalongueur*, and the three worthies marched off to the railway station.

VII.

AFTER a quiet dinner, to which *Désiré Fontaine's* two brothers and a brother of *Caroline's* had been invited, *Père Fontaine* said to his guests:

"I have invited you to-day to inform you of a very important matter."

The three relations looked at one another, ready to hear anything. *Désiré* was the successful man of the family, and they listened to and obeyed him in everything. The table was being cleared away, and *Aimée* took the children into another room, where she left them with strict injunctions not to make too much noise. She then returned to the dining-room and sat down near her uncles. *Désiré Fontaine* took up a position in the middle of the room, struck an attitude, and commenced:

"Brothers, I have invited you here to ask your advice. In the first place I must refer to the fatal error which has led to the arrest of your nephew, my son, *Adolphe*. We have at this moment in our hands clear proofs of his innocence, the appeal is to be heard the day after to-morrow, and he will be acquitted. This point now being settled, and we being in a position to hold up our heads with the conviction that our children are worthy of us, I will speak of the terrible subject of our meeting. Confiding in certain deceptive information, I was basely deceived by a man, a scoundrel who introduced himself into my house, and proposed to my dear daughter *Aimée*; the poor child, listening to the promptings of her tender heart, allowed herself to love this man. I ought to have been more severe, but as I worship my child, and she loved him, I had not the heart to refuse my consent. Now we are both being punished for our imprudence."

"He has deceived her?" said one brother.

"Does he beat her?" asked another.

"He has turned her out perhaps?" said the third.

Désiré shook his head and allowed them to go on, but Caroline said in a sharp tone, "that they were far from guessing the shameful truth." Aimée buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly. Fontaine at length continued in a hoarse voice :

"It's we who ought to drive him out—he is an infamous scoundrel, a returned convict."

"Ah!" said the three brothers as calmly as if the noble Fontaine had told them the man was a grocer.

"What! you are not terrified, don't you understand that this man's shame will fall on us."

As we have said, the three brothers took their cue in everything from their more successful elder brother. Seeing that they were expected to feel this immense shame, and show it, they immediately exclaimed :

"It's so horrible, I cannot believe it."

"It cannot be possible."

"It's a calumny."

"False! a calumny!" roared Fontaine, "well just look : pictures are painted flaunting our disgrace," here he held up the picture ; "this is the portrait of my son-in-law, your nephew, taken from life, in his convict's dress."

"His convict's dress?"

"And that is not all. It's printed, here is the newspaper in which everything is related. He is a murderer."

"What! a murderer!" exclaimed the three brothers simultaneously, as if suddenly panic-stricken.

"Yes, he's a murderer, who is trying to escape the law, but I shall give him up if you will help me."

"Just drink that," said Madame Fontaine, passing her husband a glass of sugared water.

There was a lull, during which the brothers examined the newspaper.

"Well," said Caroline's brother, "what do you intend doing?"

"That's just why I want your advice," said Fontaine, sitting down at the table, whilst the others drew up closer to him and they all engaged in a confidential conversation. Alone in one corner, Aimée was still weeping, paying no further attention to what was going on, vainly trying to repress her sobs.

"Condemned to ten years' penal servitude," continued Désiré Fontaine, "Bérard has lost all his civil rights, and is, as it were, dead; my daughter is, therefore, as good as a widow, in fact doubly so, for we are going to have the marriage annulled and this returned convict sent back to the galleys."

"That's quite just," said one of the brothers.

"My daughter being, so to speak, a widow, we must, in the children's interest, form a family council, which will appoint a guardian, who will name some one to look after the business."

"Is it a good one?" asked the youngest brother, a railway porter.

"I should think it is. I have obtained information and find that he, or they, or rather my daughter now, have more than eight hundred thousand francs."

"Eight hundred thousand francs!" exclaimed the three councillors.

"Exactly so."

"But what is to be done?"

"Here is a plan, one I have formed and which I take to be the best. I have not even spoken about it to my man of business. We must first

request the Public Prosecutor to arrest the scoundrel who has deceived an honest family. As soon as he shall have been arrested, we will form a family council, you choose me to represent my daughter and grandchildren and to manage the business—I give you all three a good situation each. To console Aimée, she will go and live on the Ile de la Grande Jatte with her mother and the children, and I can make her an allowance out of the business. In that way we protect both the family and their interests. What do you think of the plan?”

“I think it is very just,” said Caroline’s brother.

“I know,” said another, “that I have every confidence in Désiré and am ready to do anything he likes.”

“I am ready,” said the third brother, “for that is the only way of saving our niece and at the same time putting the family into a good position.”

“But,” said Caroline’s brother, “he has served his time, and even admitting what you say, Désiré, that the marriage can be annulled, he still retains possession of his property.”

“Not at all, you haven’t studied the Penal Code; those condemned to penal servitude are always placed under police supervision for life, as soon as they are discharged; now that means that he cannot live in Paris, for I am informed that no returned convicts are ever allowed to live in Paris. Not only that, I have made enquiries, and find that he has never reported himself at the Préfecture of Police.”

“And what is your conclusion?”

“I conclude,” continued Désiré without having to look, which proves he had already studied his subject, “I conclude that he is subject to article 45. ‘In case of disobedience of the instructions contained in the preceding article, the individual placed under police supervision will be condemned to prison for a period not exceeding five years.’ There is the text of the law, and law is law, you know!”

“Isn’t he well up!” remarked the youngest brother.

“Talks like a book,” replied the other.

Caroline’s brother was just as desirous of seeing the scheme succeed, but feeling less enthusiastic or rather less confident, he asked:—

“But I don’t see that this empowers us to take possession of the business for Aimée in the absence of her husband; he can appoint a representative himself.”

“Not at all, my dear brother-in-law. Article 29: ‘Whoever shall have been condemned to penal servitude will be deprived of all civil rights during his incarceration; a guardian will be appointed’—mark that: will be appointed—to manage his affairs in accordance with the rules laid down for cases of this sort. The condemned man’s property will be returned to him on his discharge, and the guardian will give a full account of his management of the affairs. During his incarceration, no money, no instalment, no portion of his revenues can be delivered to him.’

“There’s the law; we must therefore first denounce him, he will have to serve five years, and during that time we can get the marriage annulled—or at the least, a separation, which will leave this brigand nothing but a small annual allowance.”

“Very good, I am ready to act in concert with you.”

The unfortunate Aimée was still weeping, whilst these four scoundrels were making her a widow. The children were playing in the next room, and they could hear the laughter and their cries. Père Fontaine, getting impatient, said to his wife: “Just quiet those children, they are a

quaisance!" Madame Fontaine opened the door, and told them in a harsh threatening voice not to make so much noise or she would be obliged to whip them. The children pouted and made no further noise. Père Fontaine resumed: "I have prepared the letter I intend sending to the Public Prosecutor, to denounce him, I'll read it over to you."

At that moment there was a knock at the door; Désiré turned to his wife and said: "Caroline, tell the servant we are not at home to any one."

She got up, and was about to go out, when the door opened, and Bérard came in. Caroline set up a cry, the three brothers ran away terrified, whilst Désiré Fontaine recoiled, horror-struck. Aimée, on the contrary, raised her head, and gazed at her husband, waiting anxiously for him to explain his conduct and justify himself. Bérard came forward a few steps, and gazed scornfully at these men who had met together to condemn him for the second time, and murmured to himself: "It was true then!" When they recovered themselves somewhat, Désiré Fontaine placed himself in front of his brothers and said to Bérard:—

"What do you want here, sir?"

"We know you no longer," said Madame Fontaine, tartly.

Bérard fixed his eyes on the couple, shrugged his shoulders and said:—

"I have not come to see you, but to speak to my wife, as I have a right to do—I ask nothing from you, not even your pity."

Caroline knew Aimée loved her husband, and that she was constantly thinking of the unfortunate man, who had, in her opinion, sufficiently atoned for his crime. The mother had therefore to destroy the ideal that absence had conjured up in the mind of her daughter respecting her husband. Caroline was frightened, throwing herself into her daughter's arms, she exclaimed: "You have nothing more to do with our daughter, she has placed herself under our protection, and we shall protect her; the court will decide whether we are right or wrong—go out from here, you have no right in this place!"

"Ah! you refuse to hear me?"

Aimée got up, without looking at her husband, and said to her parents:—

"You ought to hear what he has to say, he may have come to clear himself."

The whole family now felt frightened. Those who complained of the disgrace about to fall on the family feared some mistake, not because of the harm done to the unfortunate Bérard, but because the plan they had conceived would become impossible. If Fontaine's son-in-law turned out to be an honest man, he would keep his business, his wife would return to him, and Désiré Fontaine himself felt that he would thus be unable to put his masterly plan into execution.

A glance exchanged with his wife expressed this thought very clearly. If Bérard were really the criminal mentioned in the "*Gazette des Tribunaux*" would he dare to invade the privacy of those whom he had disgraced by his shameful past life? Fontaine's tone became almost respectful as he said to Bérard:—

"Monsieur Bérard, we have to-day a family dinner, as you see; your uncles had joined us, and we were discussing the reasons which led Aimée to abandon the conjugal roof—a father is entitled to interfere in a matter sufficiently important to compromise both his daughter and his grandchildren—everyone is liable to make a mistake, and if we are mistaken, it is due to Aimée's version of the affair. We do not refuse to hear you, we are no ogres."

"When you came in, I was just saying we might be mistaken about you," said one of the brothers, as they all resumed their former places.

Bérard, who was very pale, did not reply. Aimée was anxiously waiting to hear what her husband would say, her whole happiness, her entire future depended on a word from him. There was a deep silence, during which all the members of the family looked at one another, hardly knowing what to say. No sound was heard, except the voices of the children in the next room, who were saying :—

"When we see papa again, we shall have some fun, he plays with us."

"Here they are all old people, and never play with us!"

"We must ask mamma to take us to see papa to-morrow."

Aimée, feeling oppressed and ill at ease during this icy silence, said to her father : "Tell him what he is accused of."

Fontaine took up the newspaper, and said in a trembling voice :—

"In this newspaper, which is fifteen years old, we find full details of the trial of a man named Jacques Bérard—"

The accused man made no reply, whilst Aimée gazed at him with wondering eyes, anxiously waiting for a word, a look—suddenly their eyes met and Jacques cast down his head—emboldened, almost pleased at this mute confession, Fontaine asked : "This Jacques Bérard, is it you?"

"Yes," said Jacques in a hoarse voice.

Aimée set up a cry, and buried her face in her hands.

"My God! my God!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, "my poor children, what will become of them?"

Désiré Fontaine drew himself up proudly; feeling himself strong before this condemned man, crushed beneath the load of his past life.

"It's you?" said he, "you, the murderer of the Bridge of l'Estacade?"

"Yes, it is I!"

"And it's you who were condemned to ten years' penal servitude?"

"Yes, I am the convict in question."

"Go away from here at once, or I will have you arrested."

Bérard slowly raised his head, looked at them with a melancholy smile, and said : "What matters to me whether I am arrested to-day or to-morrow? I will not go away."

"You will not go out?" exclaimed the three brothers simultaneously, as they got up from their seats.

Seeing them assume this aggressive attitude, Bérard boldly walked up to them; they at once recoiled, terrified, into the corner of the room. Fontaine placed himself behind his daughter, and said in a piteous voice :

"My child, protect me, he is going to murder us."

Bérard shrugged his shoulders, and seeing the cowards trembling before him, went to the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

"We are lost!" groaned Fontaine, turning ghastly pale.

"Let us call out of the window," said one of the brothers.

"You have nothing to fear," said Bérard, "I know you are capable of having me arrested before hearing what I have to say, or rather before she hears me, and I have taken my precautions. Sit down; I do not consider you have the right to judge me, she alone has that right. It is to you Aimée, the mother of my children, towards whom I have acted wrongly, it is to you that I address my explanation, to you, the faithful partner who has shared my joys and sorrows!" added the unfortunate man in a touching voice.

The poor woman was weeping and could not reply. Bérard continued :

"I deny them the right to judge me, because they are dishonest enough to inherit my money, and too honest to inherit my crime. I have paid my debt to society, and I ask you to judge me according to the dictates of your heart. I ask you, a truly religious woman, to remember the words of Him who promised the fullest pardon to the greatest of sinners."

The parents looked at one another and shrugged their shoulders. The voices of the children could again be heard. The eldest was saying :

"I think I can hear papa's voice."

"Ah !" said the youngest, "now we shall have some fun."

Bérard heard them ; a bitter smile played on his lips, and a tear rolled down his cheeks. Fontaine made an effort and said :

"Sir, as you wish it, we will hear you, but I beg you to be brief, for you can easily understand that your presence must be very disagreeable to us."

"There is a limit even to our kindness," said Caroline Fontaine, "and you cannot but see what pain you are inflicting on our dear Aimée."

Bérard was waiting for a word from his wife, but she said nothing. With an energetic gesture he stood up boldly and said : "After all, she will hear me, and I will speak out. You shall tell me what you wish me to explain to you," added he, turning to the astonished Fontaine.

VIII.

BÉRARD drew a long breath, as if to deliver his lungs from the weight that was oppressing him ; snatched off his collar which was strangling him, and overcoming his emotion commenced :

"Yes, I am a returned convict, and have served my time in the galleys. I had committed a murder, a horrible murder, and will not try to hide my guilt. I was only twenty ; a man insulted and struck me ; mad with rage and hatred, I determined to have my revenge."

Terrified by Jacques' gloomy look and nervous gestures, they had all nestled together in one spot, listening with trembling limbs to the terrible story of the returned convict. The latter, feverish and excited, saw them no longer, as he recalled the past. Aimée, with tears in her eyes, was listening with the utmost attention. She looked at her husband, and could hardly believe it was the same man she had been living with for years. Jacques Bérard continued :

"I was a workman. One Monday evening I was at a workman's ball, and got mixed up in a quarrel about a woman with a scoundrel. He is dead ; what matters ! he was a scoundrel. This man, misusing his strength, insulted and struck me before this woman, and left me lying on the pavement, covered with blood and half dead. He dragged the woman away, and his last word to me was an insult. I was thoroughly beaten, but yet could see and hear what was going on around me. When I managed to get up, they had gone, I hardly knew where I had got my fresh strength from, but I burned for vengeance ! I swear to you I did not wish to commit murder, but wanted to fight, and felt strong enough to beat the man who had just beaten me. Besides, I could not live through the disgrace which I thought had been inflicted on me. Change my position, instead of fists, put swords, and you will not say I committed a murder. I ran to overtake him, and came up to him on the quay ; the night was heavy, and the lightning played through the trees. I could see them walking along arm-in-arm ; when they heard me he turned round and said in a threatening tone : 'What do you want with me, you—?'

"I again assure you that I was not come to commit murder, and the proof of this is that I cried out to him :

" 'I want to finish what we commenced outside the ball-room !'

" 'You want some more, do you ?' said he. 'So much the worse for you.'

" 'As for me, I replied with rage and hatred :

" 'You acted like a brute and a coward ; those who strike me must kill me ; do you hear that, coward !'

" 'He, a great, strong fellow, laughed in my face, saying :

" 'You can sing your death-song !'

" 'This maddened me. He was still laughing at me, and before this woman ; sacrificing my life, almost certain of being his victim, but resolved to sell my life dearly, I replied :

" 'No quarter ! I shall give none. Take my life or I take yours.'

" 'And I sprang on him. It was a frightful scene, it was raining and the thunder was roaring. I could not feel his blows, he belaboured me and I belaboured him. Ultimately I got him by the throat and nearly choked him. 'Ah ! you want to strangle me !' he gasped.

" 'He then shook himself like a wild boar trying to shake off the dogs hanging on him. I fell, but immediately got up, whilst he drew a long breath in order to fill his exhausted lungs. When I saw him jump on me I gave myself up for lost."

Here Bérard stopped, buried his face in his hands, and hesitated about continuing, then as if making up his mind to do so, he resumed :

" 'After all, I can confess everything now. The unfortunate woman is safe from further annoyance, the legal ten years having elapsed. The woman who had been the cause of this mortal struggle now repented on seeing the result of her frivolous conduct. Bending over me, she said in a low voice : 'Run away. I will follow you !'

" 'She seized me by the arm and dragged me away just as my adversary roared out : 'This has been going on too long, I must settle you !'

" 'He wants to murder you,' said the woman, 'he has got his compasses.'

" 'And it was true, the scoundrel had got his compasses open and was even crying out : 'I will murder you !'

" 'I ran away with the woman over the Bridge of l'Estacade, but on arriving half way over, I was ashamed of my cowardice, and determined to avenge myself or die in the attempt. I stopped, and despite my companion's prayers, replied to his challenge :

" 'Come on ; I am not a coward, and do not choose adversaries weaker than myself.'

" 'He then sprang on me, armed with his compasses ; I seized him by the arm so suddenly that the compasses fell from his hand. A frightful struggle then ensued to obtain possession of the deadly weapon."

Jacques stopped for a moment, the past appeared to be so near, that he seemed, whilst relating the story, to feel the terrible anguish he had experienced at the time. He resumed :

" 'I was on the ground, almost choked, he had wrenched the compasses out of my hand, and was brandishing them over me.

" 'Oh ! it's a struggle for life now. I must have your blood !'

" 'I was lost, the seconds seemed as long as hours, I had to find a means of saving myself ; an idea crossed my mind and I put it into execution ; and there the crime commences," said Jacques in a lugubrious voice. "I gathered together all my strength, and with a rapid movement seized Le Charpentier's legs ; the latter, taken unawares, fell nearly over the para-

pet of the bridge. By a superhuman effort, I threw him quite over. He had let go the compasses and was clinging to the beams of the parapet, hanging over the black, swirling river and crying out:

"Murder! Murder!"

"It was still raining, the thunder was still roaring, and the wind whistled wildly across the deserted bridge; his voice was not heard. The woman tried to drag me away, but Le Charpentier was holding me by one leg, through the framework of the parapet, and crying out:

"You shall pull me out, or come with me!"

"And he squeezed my leg as if he would crush it. The woman, wanting to help me, took out a pair of scissors from her pocket and cut the unfortunate man's hands; he, after setting up a cry of pain which I can still hear, let go his hold, and fell into the water. Such is my crime in all its horror. It brought me ten years of penal servitude, and a life poisoned with remorse, and nights of sleeplessness. But say you that is not enough. You now know all, we shall soon see what you have a right to do." And Bérard stopped to wipe his forehead which was streaming with perspiration.

There was a moment's silence, during which they looked at one another in dismay. The story, the tone, and the manner in which it had been related had made them think they were really witnessing the terrible scene. Désiré Fontaine was livid, Aimée was weeping, with her face buried in her hands.

"Now, sir," resumed Bérard, "what have you to reproach me with? You were poor workpeople."

Fontaine did not like to be reminded of this before his relations.

"We were poor because we were honest," he retorted, proudly.

Bérard continued as if he had not heard him:

"Having served my time, released in fact before my time was up on account of my good conduct, I returned to Paris with a letter of introduction to a merchant who knew about my crime and my punishment. I bore then, as I do now, my real name, the same in which I was condemned. I made the acquaintance of your daughter, an honest and courageous milliner, as hard-working as I was myself. I loved her, and, too fond of her to live without her, I resolved not to conceal nor yet to reveal the misfortune I had formerly met with. I consulted my master about the matter and he said, 'She is poor, and you bring her a fortune, propose to her and the past will soon be effaced.'"

"He was a dishonest man," cried Désiré. "Would he have said such a thing had it been his own child?"

"Yes, considering that he looked upon me as his own son. I came to you and asked for Aimée's hand in marriage."

"It's true, I did not know you."

"You asked me: 'Will you be a good husband?' I replied, 'Yes.' Ask her if I have not kept my word. You asked me: 'Will you be a good father?' Listen to the children, you will see whether they love me. You did not ask me to be a good son-in-law, and yet think of what you are now."

"Thanks to our daughter's property, which we are *taking care of* for her," said Caroline.

Bérard made no reply to this, but continued:

"You asked me my name, I told you; for my papers, I gave them, but it was you, sir, the careful father, who ought to have taken my papers and

obtained information about me. But no ; anxious to marry your daughter off your hands, to get rid of what I have heard you call a burden, you hurried forward our marriage as fast as you possibly could. We married, and a family sprang up around us ; did you ever remember we were in existence ? Never ; we were poor, and you thought nothing of us until we were rich. Then you commenced to love us. After all, you have nothing to do with my past life. I simply want to prove to you I have kept every promise I made, that I have been a good husband, a good father, a hard-working man, and have made my family happy. You have nothing to reproach me with, and nothing to expect from me. I am not a returned convict, escaped from the galleys ; no sir, I am in Paris by special permission."

"They never give any," said Fontaine, getting anxious.

"But I have one, I tell you, and having been legally married in my own name, my marriage cannot be annulled."

"The law is the law, and I know what it says."

"To sum up : You are at liberty to do as you like, gentlemen ! Ungrateful as a full stomach, you are attacking those who feed you. I leave it to just people to decide which is the honest man among us."

"But you are insulting us !" exclaimed Père Fontaine.

"I am stating the truth."

"Go out of this room, sir, or this time I shall call in a policeman ; we have been too patient with you," said Caroline's brother, pointing to the door.

"So," said Bérard, with a bitter smile, "you drive me out ?"

Aimée had wiped her eyes, and was now looking at her father. The energy which had sustained Bérard was forsaking him ; he might have punished those who were driving him out and condemning him so severely, by referring to Fontaine's son. But he had not the courage to do so, those people merely expressed the views of the society in which they lived, and every time his past life became known, he would have to endure the same insults. He cared little for these people's contempt, his sole thought was for his wife and children ; the latter would be taken from him, and the former would become as a stranger to him, filled with horror against the returned convict ! Seeing that everything was overwhelming him, his strength forsook him, he leant up against the wall, and sobbed bitterly. Désiré shrugged his shoulders, and after having consulted by a look his worthy relatives, who now felt braver on seeing this manifestation of the unfortunate man's weakness, he said :

"For the second time, sir, I call upon you to leave my house, we cannot meet again except in a court of justice."

Making a superhuman effort, Jacques said in a supplicating voice :

"Well, M. Fontaine, as you wish it, I will retire ; but listen to me for another minute. Let me tell Aimée that it is by excess of love that I concealed my crime from her ; let me beg her pardon for the cruel future I have prepared for her. Aimée, Aimée, pray forgive me !"

A most singular thing, which greatly astonished Madame Fontaine ; Aimée was almost smiling through her tears !

"Let us put an end to this painful scene, sir, and go away."

"Another word, and I will obey you," said the poor fellow, imploringly. "I am a scoundrel in your eyes, a dishonest man, and your hatred springs from the shame I have brought on you and yours. You are right ; I love my children, I love my wife, and do not wish this disgrace to be known to all the world. The court will probably pronounce a separation between

myself and my wife, and every one will pity her. My children will be taken away from me, but they will always be held up to the world's scorn as *the convict's sons*. Pray spare them, even if you refuse to spare me." Unable to restrain his emotion any longer, the unfortunate man burst into tears, and continued :

"Do not denounce me ; I will give up everything to you. I will begin life again, but do not have me tried again. Spare my little ones ; Aimée will be the widow of a living man. I will never claim anything from you, you can be certain of that, because should I ever break my promise, you could denounce me the next day, and have me arrested. I will work in some quiet spot, and still toil for them ; but I implore you not to make the little darlings blush for their father when they grow up."

Désiré Fontaine assumed a disdainful expression, and said :

"These are all children's tales you are telling us ; you will be always hanging round us. No, sir, honest men do not compromise with convicts ; for the last time I order you to go out ; justice will not be informed till to-morrow. That's all I can do for you, and it will give you time to get away."

"You refuse ?" asked the unfortunate man anxiously.

Désiré Fontaine, with a dignified gesture, pointed to the door, saying :

"Go out !"

"Ah !" said Jacques with heart-breaking accent, "you are a pitiless man ! I pardon you, but God will surely judge you. Adieu ! Aimée, adieu !"

He opened the door and was about to retire, when Aimée jumped up, and cast a scornful glance at her relations, saying in an indescribable tone :

"You have no heart and no soul, I am more ashamed of you than of him !"

Then running to the room where the children could be heard playing, she opened the door and said to them :

"Come, my darlings, come quick, and kiss your papa."

The children rushed joyously forward to meet Jacques, who stood rooted to the spot, overcome with emotion. Imitating her children, Aimée kissed her husband, and pluckily taking his arm, said :

"Let us return home, Jacques, for I pardon you," then turning to her parents, she added : "And now you may do whatever you like, you shall not separate us."

And Aimée, superb in her audacity, went away with her husband and the children.

The parents looked at each other in astonishment. Désiré Fontaine meditated on the situation, whilst Caroline said :

"That's what we get by protecting our children's interests. She is mad."

"Just what I was thinking," said Fontaine, "and that's all the better perhaps ; we will still send the letter, simply adding that on learning what her husband was, our daughter went mad, and we will have her sequestered also."

"What a man !" said the enthusiastic relatives.

And they commenced to draw up the denunciation. Whilst they were engaged in this generous work, the servant brought in an urgent letter. Fontaine opened it and read as follows :—"Dear Sir, Will you kindly present yourself at my office to-morrow morning before your son's case is called on. I have certain very important documents. Be very reserved, moreover, about the Bérard case, a single word might completely ruin your son."

"REMITIN."

"The dence !" said Fontaine, "it's about Adolphe's affair. However, sign the letter, I will submit it to my business man to-morrow, for he recommends me to be very cautious."

They all obeyed, and the family council broke up about midnight.

IX.

ABOUT ten o'clock the next morning Désiré Fontaine knocked at the door of M. Rehtin's office, and that gentleman came himself to let him in.

"Good morning, M. Fontaine, you are a punctual man, I see."

"I was brought up like that. I can take no rest when there is work to be done, I'm one of the old sort you know."

"You must excuse me for troubling you to come to-day, but the affair is urgent and will brook no delay."

"I am ready to hear what it is."

"I am now almost sure of success with regard to your son's case. We have made his accomplice confess facts which throw the greater part of the blame on herself. We may therefore hope that he will leave the court without a stain on his character, but I had great trouble in obtaining these documents."

"Poor child ! I was always convinced of his innocence !"

M. Rehtin smiled in a singular way on hearing these words.

"I must say, between ourselves, that your son acted very wrongly ; besides we have certain precedents very damaging to the case. We can only clear him by proving the respectability of his family and giving guarantees for his honesty. Very annoying rumours, set afloat I hardly know how, are to be brought up during the trial. His unaccountable departure from Bérard's."

"But it is all a calumny, invented through jealousy ; besides you now know what this Bérard is."

"Just so, just so, but you must, at any price, avoid compromising this man ; we have the greatest need of him, his evidence alone can save your son."

"But what are you saying ?" exclaimed Père Fontaine, "we want Bérard ? Why I was going to denounce him to-day."

"Pray do nothing of the sort. In fact, I had better explain this point to you ; as you spoke to me about it, I have obtained certain information. Bérard is not an escaped convict ; he is specially authorized to reside in Paris."

"But I thought they never gave any such thing."

"He obtained this favour by the assistance of an influential man."

"Yes, but that does not prevent the marriage being annulled, and thus bringing the greater part of his property to his wife and children or their representatives."

"Such a thing is impossible, the marriage cannot be annulled ; he married in his real name, and nothing but death can alter or undo what has been done."

"But there could be a separation."

"It would have to be asked for by the two parties concerned."

"But cannot the family protect the interests of the children ?"

"The family," said Rehtin in a good-natured way, "might refuse to receive any money coming from such a source."

Fontaine's little grey eyes sparkled beneath his bushy eyebrows, and he scratched his forehead, which was with him a sign of embarrassment and disappointment. Père Fontaine was visibly baffled, all his hopes, all his illusions disappeared, and he almost refused to believe this man. He resumed :

"M. Rehtin, you certainly understand your business. But I think you are mistaken ; I also know the Code, I am a serious man, and that's my catechism, I pay attention to nothing but that."

"But the law is against you."

"I do not think so, I know my text."

M. Rehtin leant his elbow on the corner of the desk, and looking intently at his client, said :

"M. Fontaine, old women will tell you that you should conceal nothing from your confessor ; the youngest consider themselves bound to be perfectly frank with their doctor. Sharp, intelligent people, those who take a practical view of life, have only one real confidant, and that is their man of business."

"I am quite of your opinion."

"The murderer, the thief say to their lawyer : 'I am guilty, but here is what will tend to establish my innocence.' The man who is on the look-out for something should say : 'I want this. Here is a way of obtaining it. It is neither legal nor honest, but let us try and find a means of succeeding.'"

"You really speak like a book," said Fontaine, not noticing the comparison Rehtin had just made.

"Speak out freely to me, M. Fontaine."

"That's what I am going to do," said Désiré, drawing his chair closer to Rehtin. Then he continued in a lower tone : "I want to separate my daughter from her husband, and take advantage of his having been deprived of his civil rights in order to obtain possession of the business for myself and son, so as to protect the interests of my daughter and her children."

"A regular speculation, in short !"

"Yes, as you say, it's a speculation."

"You wish, in fact, your son-in-law to be plundered in your favour ; this will cause a scandal."

"We are the victims."

"It's true, people will pity you ; it's the wife and children who will suffer—morally."

"Well, that's of no consequence !"

"In short you are prepared for anything ; a scandal, by which you compromise your grandson's future, does not deter or frighten you," said Rehtin in such an engaging tone of voice that Fontaine replied with a smile :

"Not the least in the world."

Rehtin got up and disappeared for a few minutes in the alcove at the further end of the room. Fontaine looked after him, thinking he was going to fetch some document referring to the case. When he reappeared, the old man jumped up from his seat, retreated as far as the door and exclaimed in an astonished frightened voice : "Why, it's Nither !"

Nither had, in effect, transformed himself, or rather, had resumed his real character. He advanced towards the cringing Fontaine with a scornful smile.

"Yes, Nither," he said, "the man who has sole control of your children's property, who has made them what they are, and who, instead of turning

them out, has chosen Bérard for his adopted son. The man who possesses written proof that your son is a swindler, and who to save *Bérard the convict* from disgrace—that's the view I take of the matter—has paid Adolphe's accomplice to obtain false evidence which will clear him. Here is the proof," continued Nither, holding up a paper, "you can do nothing legally against Bérard; I shall keep it until the secret which you and your accomplices share shall be revealed. Jacques will be disgraced, but not ruined, and will merely have to leave Paris. As for you, your family will be disgraced, that's nothing, but what is more important, you will draw no more of his money."

Désiré Fontaine listened with bent head and wandering eye, unable to find a word to say. Nither continued:

"With people like you, one must be prepared for anything—as vipers are deprived of their sting to make them harmless, so must I prevent you doing more harm in the future. I must arrange that should you ever try to disgrace him, the shame shall fall on you."

"But what do you want with me?" asked the old man in anxious tones.

"In an hour's time your son's case will be called on; to save him you require the declaration made by Anna Davesnes I now hold in my hands—and Bérard's evidence; but the simpleton is now happy, he has forgotten everything and would be willing to go and declare that your son never robbed him—you know all that is false."

"No, sir; I do not know that."

"Of course you know it; you only like your son because he resembles you."

"In short, what do you want with me? We have no time to lose, as Adolphe is to be tried in an hour's time."

"I will sell you this paper which is to save your son."

"Sell it; you know I am too poor to buy anything since—" Here the old man stopped, looking very confused.

But Nither finished his phrase for him:

"Since you have been prevented from plundering your son-in-law; but I do not ask you for money, sit down and sign this paper." Père Fontaine took it up and read as follows:

"Dear M. Rehtin, Do the needful for the business, it must succeed. I knew very well what Bérard was when I gave him my daughter, and only consented to marry Aimée to a returned convict, because I knew I could at any time annul the marriage, and thus have his fortune transferred to our family."

"But I will never sign that, it's all false," said Père Fontaine.

"All right, let's say no more about it," said Nither, opening his portfolio.

"Yes, but you have no right to keep the proof of my son Adolphe's innocence. I can force you to give it me."

"Before proper witnesses I am prepared to hand over the two documents I hold—the first signed by Anna Davesnes, which cost me ten thousand francs, and the other from your son confessing his crime, and which cost me nothing."

"Ah! you are very hard on a poor man," said Fontaine, who dared not display his hatred. "If I sign, you will give me both the papers. But what are you going to do with the document I have just signed?"

"I shall keep it, and at the slightest imprudence on the part of yourself or your friends, I shall make use of it."

"I shall say nothing, sir," said Fontaine; then looking at his watch, he added: "I will sign my disgrace."

"You are signing your rehabilitation."

The declaration having been signed, Nither gave Fontaine Anna Davesnes' deposition, and Adolphe's letter. The old scoundrel took them, saying :

"Ah ! my poor children, it is for them I am bearing this humiliation."

"M. Fontaine, one word of advice. Your pension will be paid you regularly, but on condition that you forget you have a daughter. Bérard's house is closed to you for ever."

"Ah ! how ungrateful children are !" exclaimed Fontaine, as he went out on his way to the court.

That very day Adolphe and his accomplice were acquitted. The banker who had been robbed, a friend of M. Nither's, had appeared as a witness for the defence, having received information which led him to believe young Fontaine was not guilty.

The same evening, there was a grand dinner at Bérard's, in the Rue d'Enghien ; and Nither had brought them the news of Adolphe's acquittal. Cardinet, who arrived shortly afterwards, took Bérard into the embrasure of a window and said :

"Do you know what Linotte has done with the ten thousand francs you gave me for her?—No. She changed the first note to buy a gilt frame for your portrait ; you are hung up in the room as her guardian angel ! With the rest, she has bought Belida's goodwill, and the poor girl, rescued from poverty, blesses you as her saviour."

"Poor girl !"

"Yes, she's a good girl ; she is fond of music and good poetry—I am getting tired of the Saint-Paul quarter, and am thinking of taking rooms in her house. I shall then always have some one to read my poetry to."

"But she has gone through so much already !"

"What !" exclaimed Cardinet, "what school do you belong to, that you should insult poets in this way !"

"You know very well I belong to the charity school," said Bérard, laughing.

Cardinet was stricken dumb with astonishment, until Madame Bérard came up, took his arm and said :

"Come, M. Cardinet, dinner is on the table."

X.

A FEW months after the scenes we have just related, one bright May morning two individuals were walking along the banks of the Seine, in the neighbourhood of Poissy. The weather had been very fine for several days past, from early morn till late at night the sun had darted its ardent rays over the earth ; the wheat and oats were already getting well in stalk, and the trees had resumed their thick foliage. In the spring, nature appears in all her splendour in the morning. Full of this idea, one of the individuals said :

"It's a lovely morning, any one would take us for two virtuous citizens come out to admire the beauties of the rising sun."

It was still dark, and nature was still sleeping, not a soul was to be seen in the deserted fields. In the distance could be heard the roaring of the water passing through the locks. The sun now began to rise, everything was awakening to life, and a thousand confused sounds were to be heard, the cocks crowing, the bells jingling on the necks of the neighing

horses ; the crackling of whips, and the barking of dogs. Along the roads the peasants could be seen through the morning mist, going to their daily labour.

At the Marine Tavern the watermen and carters were making a terrible uproar ; the former with tanned faces, horny hands, and heads wrapped in caps which lapped over and kept their chilly ears warm ; the latter with robust frames, wearing smock frocks, their feet encased in immense boots, and with whips thrown round their necks. All these were swearing, laughing and drinking ; and, running about amidst them, there was a pert servant girl in short petticoats, with sharp eyes, and a laughing mouth, red cheeks, red arms, and red hands ; very buxom, and with her feet lost in shapeless slippers, over which her stockings fell in numerous folds. She swore even worse than the men, and gaily replied with her fist to the caresses of her customers.

The two individuals went into the tavern.

"Too many people here," said the tallest of the two, in a low voice.

"That doesn't matter, they won't stop all day ; besides we sha'n't stay with him," said the other, who was shorter and stouter.

"What shall we do, Ugène ?"

"Why, kill the worm, of course," then turning to the landlord he said :

"I say, young man, would you kindly serve us with two glasses of white wine."

The man poured out the wine, and the two friends chinked glasses. The tall man said :

"It's five o'clock, he ought to be here now."

"Why ?"

"Because he came out of prison yesterday."

"Just so, he has probably slept late this morning."

"This is the place he is coming to ?"

"Certainly, Petite wrote to him."

They sat down at a table and waited ; about half an hour had elapsed when Lalongueur said to Grosbouleau :

"There he is !"

Lorémont came in, went up to his old friends, and said :

"It's you Petite sent to meet me, then ?"

"Yes, in the first place because we were pleased to see you free once more."

"What does she want ?"

"She says she wishes to see you."

"But is she here ?"

"Yes, on the other side of the water."

"Let's go over then."

Lalongueur and Grosbouleau exchanged glances, and followed the baron out.

"Let's go towards the port."

"No need to do that, we have a boat."

"We will go over there, behind the islet," said Grosbouleau, "she is there in a small furnished house."

"Let us make haste," said the baron.

They went down and got into a boat which Lalongueur rowed. When they got into the middle of the stream, Grosbouleau said to Lorémont

"You were lucky to get off with six months."

"I could not have had more."

"Do you know that if they had caught us we should have got more than six months?"

"Why?"

"Because you 'made it very warm' for us."

Lorémont raised his head, on hearing Grosbouleau speak in this tone. When he saw the man's look, he was more frightened than ever, and did not fail to notice that the boat was getting behind the islet.

"I informed against you to save myself, knowing you had not been caught."

Lalongueur laid down his oars, and took up a position behind Lorémont.

"You thought we had been arrested," said Grosbouleau.

"And you put everything on to our shoulders," added Lalongueur.

"And you said Petite had murdered her child."

"And you are a blackguard, and that's all about it," said Lalongueur.

Lorémont turned ghastly pale, and looked around him, but the trees bordering the islet concealed the banks of the river from view.

"But what do you want with me?"

"We want your blood!"

"But this is a trap you have laid for me!" exclaimed the baron, trying to take up the boat-hook.

"Did you expect us to send you a post card?" said Lalongueur, in a bantering tone.

"Take me ashore again."

"Take that, coward, that's my revenge!" exclaimed Grosbouleau, dealing the scoundrel a murderous blow between the eyes.

"Here's my contribution!" said Lalongueur, striking him with all his might over his head.

"Murder! Help!" roared Lorémont trying to defend himself from his two late accomplices.

"Ah! you yell out, just wait a bit!" said Lalongueur, tripping him up and at the same time dealing him a violent blow in the stomach.

Lorémont staggered, and fell into the water; the shock of his fall capsized the boat and the two men tried to extricate themselves; but to no purpose. Then a terrible struggle ensued, Lorémont feeling that all was over with him, clung convulsively to his enemies and prevented them from saving themselves. The people on the banks had seen the boat capsize, and immediately came to the assistance of those they took to be the victims of some accident. But they arrived too late. The bodies were not recovered till the evening. When this triple case of drowning was heard of at Poissy, a crowd of people rushed to the scene of the tragedy. In the evening an elegantly dressed Parisian lady came to view the bodies. On getting into the carriage which had brought her down, she muttered to herself:

"It is better thus. No one will now know Petite—Claire Boitard can now launch out."

And the carriage went away, Petite not even thinking of having the three men buried who had died for her sake.

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